

Engaging Families

Supporting Students From Cradle to Career

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On May 25, 2011, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Kathleen Sebelius announced the new \$500 million Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge for States.

Joining Secretary Duncan and Secretary Sebelius at the announcement were business, law enforcement and military leaders who have advocated for increased investments in early learning to reduce crime, strengthen national security, and boost U.S. competitiveness.

States applying for challenge grants will be encouraged to increase access to high-quality early learning programs for children with high needs, design integrated and transparent systems that align their early care and education programs, bolster training and support for the early learning workforce, create robust evaluation systems to document and share effective practices, and help families make informed



Secretary Duncan and Secretary Sebelius announce the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant Competition.

decisions about care for their children.

The Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge will reward states that create comprehensive plans to transform early learning systems by providing better coordination, clearer learning standards, and meaningful workforce development. The Challenge will also encourage states to make the best possible use of current federal and state investments in child care and early learning.

The Obama Administration has sought and secured increased investments in Head Start and child care so that more families have access to high quality, affordable care, while also pursuing important reforms, such as requir-

ing Head Start grantees to compete for continued funding. The administration has also steered resources towards evidence-based, cost-effective home-visiting programs. Home visiting programs is a longstanding strategy for families with young children offering information, guidance, risk assessment, and parenting support interventions at home. The typical "home visiting program" is designed to improve some combination of pregnancy outcomes, parenting skills and early childhood health and development, particularly for families at higher social risk. The Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge will be administered jointly by the Department of Education and the Department of Health and Human Services.

Guidance, eligibility, range of awards and number of grants will be announced in coming weeks. The application is scheduled to be released later this summer with grants awarded to states by December 31.

What to Do When You Are Worried About Your Child's Development



Tyler is a healthy 2-year-old who eats well, sleeps through the night, and seems happy most of the time. Still, his parents have concerns about him. He crawled in a very odd way as a baby, did not learn to walk until much later than most of their friends' children, and still is not babbling or using words the way his other playmates do.



Hallie's parents are also worried. Hallie is a first-grader who is still having trouble learning the alphabet, does not speak as clearly as her friends do, and frequently has "meltdowns" or temper tantrums that her parents do not know how to handle.



Children develop differently. Some walk or talk very early while others develop these skills much



later. Most of the time that is perfectly normal and it does not mean that anything is wrong. Still, when parents see other children of the same age developing skills that they do not see in their own child, they may want to seek advice.

When parents are worried about their child, one of the first people they should talk to is their child's doctor, the pediatrician. If their child is under the age of 3, they will need to contact the agency in their state that provides "early intervention services." If their child is over the age of 3 and they are worried about his or her behavior or performance in school, they can also talk to their child's teacher and go through the school system for a screening to see if your child needs additional help. It is important for you

to understand, however, that even if the professional tells you that you should not worry, but you are still concerned, you have the right to request a screening from the school. It is important that parents put all their requests in writing so that they can create a historical record.

A federal law, the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*, also known as *IDEA*, specifies the rights of parents and explains what the state or school system must do when a parent requests a screening. There are a list of websites on page 4 to find out more about IDEA.

Every state has a Parent Training and Information (PTI) Center to help parents understand their rights, answer questions, and help parents through this process. website for parent technical assistance centers is on page 4.

Green Study Skill Program Enhances Parent-Teacher Communication



Liberty Elementary School, in Omaha, Neb., has developed and implemented a study skills curriculum called "Staying in the Green: A Stoplight Study Skills Program." The symbol for the program is a stoplight, and it represents all students being in the "Green" each day when they listen to directions the first time spoken.

While there are many programs using the stoplight as a symbol, Liberty's program is unique in that it is based on positive actions and empowers the students to own their behavior. The program teaches listening and study skills in a way that makes them easy to understand. There are clear expectations for students, many of whom are English learners. The program also provides consistency across classrooms and grade levels.

The most important part of this

program is the communication between families and school. Each student from Head Start and prekindergarten through sixth grade has an assignment notebook that goes home each day. The teacher sends a note daily about the student's academic and social progress and how well the child listened. With this simple and inexpensive communication tool, parents are aware each day of their child's success, possible teacher concerns, and other school-related topics, such as field trips. Liberty's before- and after-school sessions uses the same study skill program so that parents are informed as to how their child is doing from the moment her or she leaves home until they return in the afternoon. Parents sign the notebook and return it to school. Understanding that many parents are working long hours, and that many parents do not speak English, this tool is kept simple so that each parent

can be aware of their child's success.

Students at Liberty learn that school is their job and they must

- Come to school on time each day;
- Do all their work;
- Turn the work in to their teacher;
- Follow Liberty's rules; and
- Do what the teacher asks the first time. With this method there are no surprises at report card conferences. Liberty has a 98 percent daily participation with this communication tool.

Cecilia Di Masi, the elementary counselor at Liberty, developed the program. For more information, call Mrs. Di Masi at 402-898-1967 or email her at Cecilia.dimasi@ops.org



Secretary Arne Duncan Addresses the Mom Congress

On April 12, 2011, U.S. Secretary of Education Duncan spoke to attendees about the crucial role that parents play in helping implement the national agenda for improving the country's school system and the educational opportunities available to our nation's children. To make the kind of change necessary, Duncan called on parents to demand more from schools. "Your voice, your passion, your fierce advocacy is what the country has been missing," he said.

Duncan urged parents to engage at every level, including where school, district, state, and federal

decisions are being made. He called upon parents to be part of the solution, and to offer suggestions on how we can work together to close achievement gaps and improve student learning. He asked parents to speak up when they see the curriculum narrowing or when teachers are not receiving the professional development they need.

"You guys have got to be truth-tellers," he urged. "You have to ask the really hard questions." Duncan encouraged parents to advocate for and demand excellence from schools. "When it comes to education, the nation's

budget should reflect the principles of its people," Secretary Duncan said.

Georgetown's School of Continuing Studies (SCS) is the educational provider for members of the Mom Congress, which comprises hundreds of education advocates across the nation. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and MyI underwrote the 2011 Mom Congress.

To hear Secretary Duncan speak go to <http://www.parenting.com/blogs/mom-congress/kate-parentingcom/watch-education-secretary-arne-duncan-speak-live-mom->



"Your voice, your passion, your fiery advocacy is what the country has been missing."

- Secretary Duncan

Webinar Discusses Parental Engagement During High School

Successful Transitions to High School was the seventh webinar in the Achieving Excellence and Innovation in Family, School and Community Engagement webinar series. Held on June 23, 2011, the webinar highlighted ways to support students and families during the transition from middle to high school—a critical time for setting the course to graduate from high school on time and be ready for college.

Presenters provided information on what is needed to ensure a smooth entry into ninth grade, such as course-work sequencing and graduation require-

ments; explored how schools and community organizations can partner with families to provide services, such as tutoring, mentoring, and after-school programming; and highlighted services that offer essential information and assistance for students and their families throughout the college application process.

Additionally, presenters discussed how to support high school completion and college readiness and highlighted the role of families, communities, and school staff in helping students transition into ninth grade.

Presenters included Samantha Wigand, education consultant, United Way Worldwide; Joanna Hornig Fox, deputy director, Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University; Beth Porter, national executive director, Breakthrough Collaborative; and Carol Myers, consultant, Indiana State Parental Information and Resource Center (PIRC).

To view the webinar, retrieve resources, and listen to archived webinars in this series, please visit the following link:

http://www.nationalpirc.org/engagement_webinars/



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Every investment in a parent is an investment in the child.

Resources

Resources that can help parents of children with disabilities or special needs:

- The National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities: <http://nichcy.org>.
- The National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (NECTAC): <http://www.nectac.org/contact/contact.asp>.
 - This is for parents of children who are not yet in school. If your child is under 3 years old, look for information about Part C; for children who are preschool age, look for information about Section 619. [Part C and Sec. 619 of IDEA]
- Parent Technical Assistance Center Network: <http://www.parentcenternetwork.org>.

Did You Know?

The Department has an Information Resource Center (IRC) that operates as a citizen contact center. IRC offers members of the public information, referrals, and in-depth assistance on all aspects of Federal education law and policy as well as on nationally focused Departmental initiatives. Services are provided via a toll-free telephone number in English or Spanish (1-800-USA LEARN) and a Web portal at <https://answers.ed.gov>, where citizens can access the answers to more than 132 frequently asked questions, as well as submit questions via emails to the Department.

Upcoming Events

The U.S. Department of Education’s Education Policy Briefing Series presents:
Listen and Learn: Education and Parental Involvement
From a Parent’s Perspective
 Sept. 29, 2011

**400 Maryland Ave. S.W.
 Barnard Auditorium
 Washington D.C. 20202**

10:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. [for column to the left—per AP, all addresses should have Ave.; hyphen for phone no. with no space before/after; other terms such as St. and Blvd. also need period at end, like Ave.]

The U. S. Department of Education (ED) is advancing Secretary Duncan’s vision for parent and family engagement. Parents can serve in at least one of three roles: partners in learning, advocates for better schools, and decision makers who choose the best educational options for their children. In an effort to raise awareness on the secretary’s vision, ED’s Office of Communications and Outreach is organizing a policy briefing series on parent and family engagement. To date, ED has had two briefings in a three-part series on Parent Involvement and Family Engagement. The first two in the series addressed research and best practices, respectively. The third session will feature a panel composed of a grandparent, a parent of a child with disabilities and special health

This publication was produced by the Office of Communication and Outreach in collaboration with members of the Parent Outreach Interagency Team, U.S. Department of Education. OCO has a team of family engagement specialists that work with state and local education agencies to empower parents with the information, training, and education needed to be full partners in learning regarding the academic progress of their child (ren). The team recognizes that parents need to be equipped with the tools necessary to make them informed partners and equal stakeholders.