



Early Learning Stakeholder Meeting | Race to the Top in FY2012

Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to share ideas on early learning within Race to the Top for fiscal year 2012. I intend to address just a few major strands within my brief comments:

First, let me commend you and the administration for all that you have accomplished on behalf of young children. AND in what by most measures in the policy world is a relatively short time.

I am Jana Martella, and I was invited here to speak on behalf of the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education. Our full agency members work from their state capitals – individually or collectively within their offices, they may oversee or direct their state pre-k programs, 619 programs, a number are their state’s Head Start collaboration officers, a few are also the Child Care Administrator for their State, many more are key staff to their State Early Childhood Advisory Councils -- they are called early childhood specialists, consultants, directors, assistant superintendents and in a couple of cases “Commissioner”.

I have in my hand (and will place in the back for others) a copy of recommendations submitted by my organization to the new Administration in early January of 2009 (if you remember, the transition time before the inauguration.) I’d like to point out just a few of these, because I think they are relevant, and they will provide us all a chance to celebrate a little.

[We recommended then that the Administration] establish ... Offices of Early Learning in both the Department of Education and the Department of Health and Human Services... with...high level representatives that function as liaisons among the White House and the Departments of Education and Health and Human Services; [authority to] coordinate budgets and activities for early childhood programs and initiatives; expand, strengthen and collaborate in research and technical assistance activities; support the establishment and continuing operations of statewide Quality Rating Improvement Systems; [in short] establish a federal framework that reflects and supports a coordinated approach to services for children and families.

I won’t say these recommendations were prescient – we have all been at this hard work for sometime – but I do think we have arrived at a significant moment – one in which, interestingly and during this particular week, we are discussing how to optimize early learning initiatives across three fiscal years.

The first of my key requests is to urge you to seize this very important funding opportunity -- between FY11 implementation and the FY13 request to designate a significant portion of the

\$550M in the FY12 Race to the Top pool for the purpose of extending the reach of the Early Learning Challenge.

As promised, the checks were in the mail at the end of last year, and the nine fortunate recipients are now racing, literally, to rationally begin their implementation processes. At the same time, all 37 states and jurisdictions that submitted applications to the ELC expended tremendous human energy and resource in the short time-span of the competition. I have heard from many – win or lose - that they felt the process itself, though very demanding – was also very worthwhile. And many, if not all, are revisiting their applications, and measuring how they can go about realizing the visions, and objectives they addressed, or at least portions.

Systemic work is long-term endeavor, and the collective authors of the ELC applications have been working together for a long time, albeit, some more effectively than others. But, the ELC did provide an impetus to speed the effort—we believe it is a watershed. A second round, immediately following the wave of thinking, planning and expended effort that took place last year, would be an essential means to continue the momentum, and build out the overarching objectives of the challenge itself, improved learning outcomes for all young children.

It is true that I am here on behalf of the state specialists, but I also work with and provide executive leadership for the National Association for Regulatory Administration (NARA). Portions of NARA's in-agency members oversee childcare licensing in their states. A few are *ALSO* their state's Child Care Administrators, another few are assistant-secretaries, or deputy-commissioners of their departments of human services, or children, youth and families. They are called licensing directors, supervisors, and inspectors. They are not the *WHOLE* of early learning system, but together, the State Specialists and NARA strengthen the system from the ground up, from the rules and regulations that assure the health and safety of children across all programs and settings – to the implementation of the early learning and development standards that support school readiness. And in between they weave together the data systems and performance measures that support policy decisions and more formatively support the daily interactions young children have with the adults that serve them in programs and settings every day.

Which brings me to the final request. The architecture of quality built into the Early Learning Challenge – strengthened rules and regulations, early childhood systems of standards and comprehensive assessment, professional competencies, and development among the other key components -- are all both systemic and *STATE* functions. Although their promise is realized in those programs and settings where children grow and learn, it is essential that the infrastructure that supports their experiences be anchored to the state system of quality assurances discussed within the Challenge. In this way that quality will be equitable and sustainable.

Indeed the Challenge did ratchet up the effort on these key state functions. We believe the time is *NOW* to turn it up one more notch and we are eager to help you in any way we can on the way.