



Legislative UPDATE – December 19, 2011

**Nine States Receive the RTT: Early Learning Challenge Grant Awards**

*From:*

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On Friday, the White House announced that nine states – California, Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, North Carolina, Ohio, Rhode Island, and Washington-will receive grant awards from the \$500 million Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge fund.

The meeting that we had asked for prayer about did take place between the legislative staff of Minnesota Representatives Bachmann, Kline, Cravaack, and Paulsen and the staff of Department of Education and Department of Health and Human Services Secretaries Duncan and Sebelius. We are thankful to the Lord that this meeting took place and the outcome of the meeting was that there will be a letter of clarification sent to the Representatives' offices. But we fear that the letter will only be a clarification of the federal government's position that each state must individually decide to exempt private schools in the original grant application. In the case of Minnesota, we do not believe that an exemption was included. We have been in contact with Minnesota State Senator Gen Olson's office and her staff is working on a meeting with officials from the Minnesota State Department of Education in early January (*Please pray regarding this meeting*).

Monies allocated to the state of Minnesota will go primarily to lower income children on our Indian reservations (to create and pay for kindergarten readiness programs), lower income families (in the form of scholarships) in St. Paul, and existing schools (statewide) that want

to add four-year-old preschool programs. Accountability of grant monies will be in the assessment of kindergarten readiness testing over a period of time to see if early learning intervention of new programs and dollars had an impact on the achievement gap in a positive way.

While we do not totally disagree with the efforts of our state Department of Education in seeking these goals (perhaps more on this later), we want to make sure that private schools, and particularly private religious schools like ours, will not be forced to comply with any set of learning objectives, licensure (teacher or program), or mandatory kindergarten entry testing.

Also on the docket is the possibility of introducing legislation which would protect our private schools from any state or federal mandates in the next session. Before we go in that direction, we want to meet with our State Department of Education to see how this current concern will be addressed.

Special thanks go to Minnesota State Senators Olson and Wolf and their staff and the Senate Education Committee for their help and work on this issue.

For now, the focus of all our efforts will turn from a national effort to make a change in the grant application itself to a state effort to protect the private schools of Minnesota. We encourage the states that received the grant to do the same in their respective states.

We ask that you continue to pray for guarantees of protection of our private early education programs from federal government mandates.

Thank you for your prayers.

-Mr. Alan J. Hodak  
Executive Director, MACS