

THE RACE TO THE TOP

Promoting Innovation, Reform, and Excellence in America's Public Schools

In July, 2009, President Obama issued a national challenge to reshape America's educational system to better engage and prepare our students for success in a competitive 21st century economy and workplace. Designed to incentivize excellence, spur reform, and promote the adoption and use of effective policies and practices, the Race to the Top is a comprehensive vision for school reform backed by a historic, \$4.35 billion investment.

Last year, the President applauded states' progress toward undertaking reforms that will enable them to better qualify for a competitive award under the Race to the Top. The competition has generated an overwhelming response from states, with over 30 states expected to compete for first-round funding. Final applications for the first set of awards under the Race to the Top are due today to the U.S. Department of Education.

At Graham Road Elementary School in Falls Church, VA, the President will announce his plans to continue the Race to the Top, and request \$1.35 billion for the program in his FY 2011 budget. The President will also announce that his plan will invigorate district-level reform by establishing a separate competition for school districts prepared to embark on system-wide improvement of their educational policies and practices. The President's plan will support further incentives for states to revise, strengthen, and implement their plans for education reform in order to qualify for an award under the program.

The continuation of the Race to the Top is one part of a larger education reform agenda that the Obama Administration will unveil in the coming weeks, including continuation of the Race to the Top's companion program, the Invest in Innovation Fund.

RACE TO THE TOP

On November 18, 2009, the Race to the Top criteria and application were published in the federal register. Winners of the first Race to the Top awards will be announced in April 2010. A second round of applications from states will be due in June 2010, with winners expected in September.

The Race to the Top emphasizes the following reform areas:

- **Designing and implementing rigorous standards and high-quality assessments**, by encouraging states to work jointly toward a system of common academic standards that builds toward college and career readiness, and that includes improved assessments designed to measure critical knowledge and higher-order thinking skills.

- **Attracting and keeping great teachers and leaders in America's classrooms**, by expanding effective support to teachers and principals; reforming and improving teacher preparation; revising teacher evaluation, compensation, and retention policies to encourage and reward effectiveness and increase the number of effective teachers in our schools; and ensuring that our most talented teachers are placed in the schools and subjects where they are needed the most.
- **Using data to inform decisions and improve instruction**, by fully implementing a statewide longitudinal data system, training and supporting educators to use data to improve instruction, and making information more accessible to parents, teachers and other key stakeholders.
- **Using innovation and effective approaches to turn-around struggling schools**, by asking states to prioritize and transform persistently low-performing schools.
- **Demonstrating and sustaining education reform**, by promoting collaborations among business leaders, educators, and other stakeholders to raise student achievement and close achievement gaps, and by expanding support for high-performing public charter schools, reinvigorating math and science education, and promoting other conditions favorable to innovation and reform.

STATES AND DISTRICTS RACE TO THE TOP

Since dedicating over \$4 billion to the Race to the Top through incentives in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, states and communities across the nation have revised educational policies and practices to strengthen and expand education reform consistent with the principles reflected under ARRA and the Race to the Top.

48 states and the District of Columbia have joined a national partnership led by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers to develop a common core of new, rigorous college and career-ready standards in reading and math.

California and Wisconsin have recently enacted legislation to enable student achievement data to be linked to teacher and principal performance, and **Indiana** now permits the use of student performance data for teacher evaluation.

Illinois, Louisiana, Tennessee and California have all recently altered laws or policies affecting public charter schools to enable their expansion and success. **New York** was called into a special session on Monday, January 18th to consider an expansion of the number of charter schools in the state ahead of the RTT application deadline.

Connecticut, Delaware, Indiana, Ohio, Rhode Island and Michigan have advanced policies to preserve and strengthen public charter schools. Similar efforts are being

considered in *New York, and Iowa*.

This week, *Massachusetts* passed and signed into law legislation allowing for the expansion of high quality charter schools and providing for stronger school turnaround efforts in persistently under performing schools.

Delaware's State Board of Education recently approved regulatory changes to improve teacher evaluation, incorporating rigorous and comparable measures of growth in student achievement that is tied to a rating system to make determinations of teacher effectiveness.

The *Tennessee* legislature passed legislation that establishes changes to the state's teacher evaluation policy, and strengthens the state's role in turning around persistently underperforming schools.

In *Detroit, Michigan*, the school district has forged a new model for teacher compensation that rewards successful performance, and the district has established "priority schools" to identify and turn-around struggling schools. For the first time, Detroit teachers will play an active role in driving staff development, counseling and mentoring their peers, and determining school bonuses.

New Haven, Connecticut ratified a new four-year contract for its teachers, including a new teacher evaluation system that considers student learning gains in the assessment of teacher performance and that identifies and provides interventions for struggling teachers through a peer-assistance and review program . To promote innovation, New Haven will promote a new process for changing traditional conditions in schools – enabling reforms such as expanding the school day – and will facilitate the conversion of underperforming schools into charter schools, where the school principal will select and build his or her instructional team.

Florida is moving to join Louisiana as the only other state in the nation that will commit to evaluating the success of their teacher preparation programs by tracking the impact of recent graduates in the classroom.

GRAHAM ROAD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

At Graham Road Elementary, one of the lowest-income yet highest-achieving schools in Fairfax County, Virginia, close to 80 percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price meals and 95 percent of the school population is comprised of African American and Latino students. In 2008, all of the school's sixth-graders met Virginia's reading standards, and 96 percent met math standards.

Five years ago, Graham Road Elementary implemented a comprehensive strategy to turn-around student achievement, adopting rigorous and high-quality student assessments, teacher evaluation and professional development, and innovative and effective use of data systems to track student performance. Graham Road is a language and fine arts school

with a modified calendar. Students have the option to take part in intersession classes three times a year.

Graham Road's teachers collaborate to develop extensive "curriculum maps" through quarterly instructional meetings, developing strategies to improve instruction, motivate students, and encourage higher order thinking skills. Graham Road recruits committed, highly-skilled teachers, and assesses their ability to pay careful attention to every aspect of learning. Teachers are organized around "professional learning communities" where they analyze data in detail, develop lesson plans with other teachers, and evaluate their professional weaknesses dispassionately. Each day, seasoned teachers help newer teachers use data to improve instruction and to match their curriculum to state standards.