



News for Immediate Release

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Pennsylvania Educators Join Preparations for 'Race to the Top' Competition

Educators across PA Begin to Help in State's Quest for Federal Grants

Harrisburg – Education leaders in Pennsylvania's 500 school districts will begin an unprecedented discussion this week to help Pennsylvania earn a share of the federal government's \$4.35 billion "Race to the Top" competitive funding.

"Race to the Top is a tremendous opportunity for Pennsylvania to build on its academic gains, and our ability to compete for our share of these funds will depend strongly on the feedback we receive from local educators in the coming weeks," Education Secretary Gerald L. Zahorchak said.

Pennsylvania is well-positioned to compete for a piece of federal Race to the Top funds based on its academic progress in recent years, its focus on efforts ranging from early childhood education to high school reforms, and Governor Edward G. Rendell's commitment to the adequate funding of all schools, the secretary said.

Secretary Zahorchak stressed that the input and involvement of school districts will be critical to the state's Race to the Top effort.

"The Race to the Top competition will give considerable advantage to those states that can demonstrate there is strong support from school districts for implementing reforms at the state and district level," the secretary told the 500 district superintendents in a recent letter. "We must act swiftly and decisively at all levels of our public school system to ensure we submit the strongest application possible."

Race to the Top – part of the federal stimulus program - is a \$4.35 billion effort to encourage innovation and reform in public education through competitive grants to states. Only a handful of states are expected to receive grants during the first round of Race to the Top funding early next year.

Pennsylvania could receive up to \$400 million in the first round of funding if it submits a strong application to the U.S. Department of Education, Secretary Zahorchak said.

One factor the federal government will stress for judging each state's application is the commitment of local school districts to achieving reforms. To that end, each

school district will have to determine whether it wants to join as a “participating district” in Pennsylvania’s Race to the Top process.

Participating districts will receive substantial benefits as part of their commitment to Race to the Top. Using the assumption that Pennsylvania will receive \$400 million and have 150 participating districts, at least \$200 million would be shared among participating districts, with allocations to those districts ranging from \$100,000 to millions of dollars.

To begin the local conversation on Pennsylvania’s Race to the Top application, the Department of Education is reaching out to districts via Webinars this week to discuss the Race to the Top grant competition. The department also issued a detailed document to superintendents on local Race to the Top participation that is available on its Web site.

“We are in the midst of an exciting conversation about the best ways to continue our academic progress, and the voices of local educators will be a critical part of our efforts,” Zahorchak said.

The state is asking districts to decide this month whether they intend to take part as a participating district in Race to the Top. The state’s application to the U.S. Department of Education must be submitted by Jan. 19, 2010.

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