

Reach for Success: Innovations in Funding Sources, Job Creation and Programmatic Strategies in P-20

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There is a definite need in New York State to improve and expand our educational system if New York is to remain an economic global leader.

In New York State, the Board of Regents, makes policy and oversees education on all levels throughout the State. The New York State Board of Regents, at its December, 2009 meeting, took the first in a series of steps to strengthen and transform the preparation and practice of teaching with a specific emphasis on providing high needs schools with the best teaching faculty possible.

Governor Spitzer in his State of the Union address noted that we cannot “let ourselves be paralyzed by challenging fiscal times. Some of the nations and New York States greatest triumphs have come out of bold decisions made during difficult times. Since the projected revenues are taking a down turn we need to take definitive steps to place New York State in a competitive position to be qualified for additional funding”.

President Obama on February 24, 2009, clearly stated that “in a global economy where the most valuable skill you can sell is your knowledge, a good education is no longer a pathway to opportunity – it is a pre-requisite. The countries that out teach us today will out compete us tomorrow”. The President is pushing reform, pursuing and rewarding excellence and dramatically changing out schools. Knowledge has become the most important skill for achieving success in the global economy.

The Race To The Top Funds (RTTT) on the federal level are designed, according to US Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, “to stimulate the economy in the short term and invest in education and other essential public services to ensure the long term economic health of our nation”. The RTTT funds will be awarded through a highly competitive grant proposal with \$4.35 billion dollars available to the states. This is designed to create jobs and reform education.

The United States Department of Education, therefore, has invited states to submit proposals for the Race to the Top Funding (see Table 1 for RTTT Scoring Overview). The Secretary of Education has targeted a broad range of issues giving extra points to states that address these initiatives in their proposals. These initiatives must replicate tested and proven educational reform strategies in four areas according to Secretary Arnie Duncan:

1. *adopting internationally benchmarked standards and assessments that prepare students for success in college and in the workplace;*
2. *recruiting, developing, rewarding and retaining effective teachers and principals*
3. *building data systems that measure student success and inform teachers and principals how they can improve their practices. They will track student achievement from pre school through college and link student achievement to teacher and principal tenure.*
4. *turning around the lowest performing school. The goal will be to scale up strategies that work.*

The Race To The Top Funding will also require several major policy changes in order to be competitive:

- *raising the cap on Charter Schools in New York State to 400 schools;*

- *requiring an increase in the numbers of skilled teachers in hard to staff areas – STEM (science, technology, engineering and math)*
- *creating a professional career ladder for teachers including master teachers, mentor teachers, professional teachers and an increased number of leadership positions;*
- *reforming testing using formative and summative assessment of students;*
- *closing student achievement gaps and raising graduation rates for students across the state;*
- *recruiting skilled teachers to work with high need students;*
- *ensuring transparency and rigorous accountability;*
- *demanding a special focus on proven strategies that have improved student performance;*
- *broadening the range of areas in the curriculum to include the arts, economics, multi media and information technology;*
- *partnering with cultural institutions such as museums and non profit corporations to award higher education degrees including doctorates;*
- *transforming teacher and leader preparation to embrace a clinical field based approach;*
- *creating profiles of teacher and leader preparation organizations and institutions;*
- *focusing on teacher subject matter competency;*
- *improving classroom management techniques;*
- *developing teacher residency programs as an alternative.*

Since the funding under the Race To The Top will only be available for two years the State recipients should be prepared to sustain these programs.

The Race To The Top Funds call for strong partnerships and shared commitments of students, parents, teachers, principals, superintendents, boards, college administrators, state school chiefs, governors, legislatures, and elected officials. Investments in human capital are imperative for economic growth.

References

1. Duncan Arne, US Secretary of Education, “Duncan Offers Stimulus Funds for States to Develop Rigorous Assessments Linked to Common Standards” Press Release Washington D.C., June 15, 2009
2. Obama Barack, President of the United States, Address to a Joint Session of Congress, Washington D.C., February 24, 2009
3. New York State Education Department, Memorandum of the committees on Elementary, Middle, Secondary and Continuing Education, Albany, New York December, 2009
4. Spitzer E. Governor of New York State, State of the State Address, New York State, 2008
5. United States Office of Education, Race To the Top Funds, Press Release 2009

Table 1

RTTT Scoring Overview

- In order to be eligible, states can not:
 - Prohibit use of student data in the evaluation of teachers
 - Prohibit charter schools
- 500 total pots in 7 categories: 50% based on State’s existing reform conditions; 50% on future plans

Section		% of total points
State Success Factors		25%
Standards and Assessments		14
Data systems		9
Great Teachers and Leaders		28
Turning Around Low Perf Schools	10	
Reform Conditions (including charters)	11	
Competitive Preference 2:STEM		3

- For each category, the application provides guidance on what is necessary to receive low, medium, or high points