

To: AFT Executive Council
State Federation Presidents

From: Randi Weingarten, President

Date: November 12, 2009

Subject: Final Requirements for Race to the Top Fund

Today, the U.S. Department of Education released the final requirements for the \$4 billion Race to the Top (RTTT) Fund. It has been suggested that only 20 states will receive RTTT awards.

I want to give you a heads-up on what you will be hearing in the coming days. Attached is a preliminary summary of the requirements prepared by AFT staff, our press release, and a chart detailing how applications will be scored by the Education Department. The department received more than 1,100 comments in response to the proposed federal regulations released this summer. Included in that number were comments submitted by the AFT and many of our affiliates.

The department worked hard to strike the right balance between what it takes to get systemwide improvement for schools and kids, and how to measure that improvement. These grants present an opportunity for experimentation and innovation—particularly, for meaningful collaboration among all stakeholders. In reaching out to our affiliates, we've learned that some states have been working closely with key educational stakeholders to develop an RTTT application that reflects true collaboration, and that includes a role for our leaders and members in the implementation of the state plan. Others report that state outreach has not been as good.

In the RTTT comments we submitted to the Education Department in late August, we stressed that:

- Collaboration is key;
- A single test should never be the sole measure of how anyone—student or teacher—is performing;
- Resources should be committed to developing solid, reliable and transparent evaluation systems;
- Teacher voice must be a central part of any substantive, sustainable reform;
- Transformation models using proven programs to turn around low-performing schools should not be given second-class status in the list of approved models for helping struggling schools; and
- Public charter schools must be held accountable and serve all students, not just those they might choose to serve.

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Based on the Education Department's summary materials (we have not yet seen the actual, final document), I want to offer the following observations:

- The requirements don't reflect every change we'd like to see, but there are some substantial changes between the draft regulations and the final regulations.
- Language was added that states' teacher evaluation systems must be designed and developed with teachers, use student growth rather than actual scores, and incorporate multiple measures in these new approaches.
- The department recognizes that plans for the implementation of evaluation systems must be worked out at the local level.
- The regulations reflect the fact that schools succeed where there is collaboration, cooperation and a culture that respects teachers' and parents' views.
- For school turnarounds, the transformation model (see summary for more details) is now a first-tier option.
- New language was included that would encourage districts to operate innovative, autonomous public schools other than charter schools.
- The push for common standards remains important.

If RTTT is implemented poorly by states and districts, we could be back in a situation where top-down management practices continue; data collection and measurement for measurement's sake still rule the day; responsibility for student performance is not shared with anyone beyond teachers and schools; and the new evaluation systems focus too narrowly on teacher effectiveness (labeling/sorting) without providing enough resources for proven supports that would actually help improve teaching and learning. Finally, the lessons to be drawn from RTTT's implementation will certainly have an impact on the upcoming Elementary and Secondary Education Act reauthorization process.

Much work lies ahead as states work on their RTTT applications. We look forward to working with all of you as we move forward. AFT staff will send you a link to the Department of Education's Web site for more information on today's announcement. If you have any questions or should need any additional information, please call the AFT educational issues (202/879-4463) or legislative departments (202/879-4452) for assistance.

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