



State of New Jersey

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
PO Box 500
TRENTON, NJ 08625-0500

JON S. CORZINE
Governor

LUCILLE E. DAVY
Commissioner

December 31, 2009

Dear Chief School Administrator:

As a follow-up to my letter inviting you to the meeting on January 5, 2010 at 10:30 a.m. at the War Memorial in Trenton, I want to provide you with more information on the New Jersey Race to the Top application (RTTT) and to encourage your participation. This competitive, discretionary federal grant program will provide significant resources to improve our State's performance in four key areas:

- implementing clearer, higher standards and related assessments;
- using data systems to inform and improve teaching and learning;
- improving the quality of classroom teaching and school leadership; and
- turning around persistently low performing schools.

We are taking a comprehensive and coherent approach to reform, with a central focus on higher quality teaching and learning. Our proposal will incorporate the following key principles, mapped to the "four assurances" outlined in the federal policy:

- We will monitor the development of the "common core" standards and evaluate them for adoption upon release. If the State Board adopts the new standards, we will support the transition to these new standards by developing a "curriculum and assessment spine" - a framework of instructional materials, integrated formative assessment practices, and professional supports for teachers;
- We will extend our data systems to support high-quality instructional planning in the classroom and communities of practice among professionals;
- We will increase the focus on classroom practice, supported by professional development, and incorporate fair, transparent, and rigorous evaluation practices;
- We will turn around our persistently low-performing schools with a combination of customized instructional and social supports which will be regularly evaluated for effectiveness in improving student achievement.

Two key elements will be leveraged in our comprehensive reform: a curriculum-driven, integrated-assessment program and a comprehensive technology system that integrates assessment data, instructional resources, and on-demand teaching tools. These systems will be built with an open architecture that can integrate with LEA systems.

We believe that New Jersey is well positioned to win a Race to the Top grant for a number of reasons. First, New Jersey has already validated several successful school innovation programs that are in line with the goals of Race to the Top. Second, leadership at the district level has consistently demonstrated support for progressive changes needed to improve educational outcomes. Finally, we have created an aggressive, yet achievable plan to effect meaningful change in our schools.

If our proposal is successful, we will receive up to \$400 million of federal support, spread over four years. Of these funds, 50% will flow directly to participating Title I school districts (through Title I formulas) to support the program; the remaining 50% will be used to fund state and district activities in support of the comprehensive program.

It is your choice whether to join in our proposal as a "participating district." If you do join us by signing the attached Memorandum of Understanding and the state wins a grant, your district will receive direct funding and/or technical and professional development assistance from the NJ DOE to support the reforms outlined below. You will also join a community of progressive districts in New Jersey who will be working on a common reform model to make our education system better at all levels. We hope that you will choose to participate as an active partner in this reform, because we believe our program will provide real value to your constituents and because the more districts that participate, the more likely we are to win the grant.

We ask that you make your evaluation, decision, and planning activities on RTTT a very high priority in early January. Our proposal is due to the U.S. Department of Education on January 19th. The timeline for our grant application and your participation in it follows:

| <i>Before January 19th Race to the Top Deadline</i> | |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| Action Item | Date |
| RTTT Briefing packet sent to local superintendents including draft MOU | 12/30 |
| District superintendent RTTT meeting (in-person in Trenton, NJ) | 1/5 |
| Superintendents review materials with local education stakeholders, including school board president and local union president | 1/5-1/11 |
| District superintendent RTTT webinar (online teleconference for those unable to attend the 1/5 meeting) | 1/8 |
| Draft of full state RTTT proposal sent to superintendents | 1/11 |
| Superintendents review draft plan with presidents of school board and local union | 1/11-1/14 |
| Deadline for school district to submit final Memorandum of Understanding to New Jersey Department of Education affirming participation | 1/14 |
| <i>After Race to the Top Award</i> | |
| Develop district-level implementation plan for application activities | 90 days after award |
| Receive New Jersey approval for implementation plans | 30 days after DOE receipt of plan |

In the attached memorandum, “Our Vision for the Race,” we have outlined the key elements of our reform plan, the expectations for participating districts, and the required steps if you choose to participate. I look forward to seeing you on Tuesday and hope you will join us in building on our years of success and planning a brighter future for the children of New Jersey.

Sincerely yours,

Lucille E. Davy

Lucille E. Davy

Commissioner of Education

Attachments: “Our Vision for the Race”
Participating LEA Draft Memorandum of Understanding

Our Vision for the Race

Assurance: Advance Standards and Assessment

New Jersey's accomplishments, including the recent revision of our core curriculum standards in nine content areas, will serve as the foundation for our Race to the Top plan. The current process to review and update the New Jersey Core Curriculum Standards will serve as the catalyst for the alignment of curriculum, instruction, professional development, and assessment systems across the state from early childhood through high school. Building on the work already underway in New Jersey to assist with all aspects of standards implementation, the state will work with local leaders and national experts to create a "curriculum and assessment spine" – an integrated set of formative assessment tools, learning trajectories, and curricular exemplars. The spine will provide clear, concise, and consistent guidance to teachers about pedagogy and expectations for all children. We will surround the "curriculum and assessment spine" with a comprehensive program of in-person and on-line professional development, leverage a unifying technology platform, and provide collaborative time for teachers and school leaders to review and plan instruction based on real-time student data and collectively review student work.

Our plan will include:

- **Assessment Practices that Support Instruction:** Building on the formative assessment pilot programs in over 250 New Jersey districts, we will provide educators with a broad array of approaches to assessment, embedded within standards-aligned curriculum, to provide instructionally relevant information for teachers to adapt instruction based on student needs. This balanced approach to assessment will support both assessment for learning *and* assessment of learning that focuses on the critical thinking, creativity, and problem solving skills necessary to master rigorous content standards. A technology system will support the creation and refinement of new formative items by teachers and use of a variety of approaches of assessment to help teachers plan instruction.
- **Evidence-Based Instructional Tools:** We will broadly disseminate suggested texts, tasks, teaching routines, and guidance for teachers with a focus on STEM. If the Common Core State Standards are adopted, the materials will be correlated to those standards, with a transition path from New Jersey's Core Curriculum Content Standards. We will provide new curriculum and instruction tools that specify desired pathways through subject matter to lead to mastery of the standards.
- **Summative Assessment:** If the Common Core Standards are adopted by the State Board, we will participate in a multi-state consortium to develop a summative assessment as part of the RTTT Standards and Assessment competition. By doing so we will leverage an economy of scale with respect to item development and implementation platform.

Among other contributions, the LEA will be expected to support this work by providing collaborative learning time, working with experts to develop and implement curriculum and assessment tools, and adopting the instructional assessment tool.

Assurance: Data Systems to Support Instruction

New Jersey will build upon our existing state data systems to enable more powerful use of data and collaboration to enhance insight and action at the classroom, school, district, and state level. We will expand our systems to include or integrate data from special education programs, limited English proficiency programs, early childhood programs, human resources, finance, health, postsecondary, and other relevant areas. We will also support true "instructional improvement" - planning classroom instruction based on formative assessment results. This expanded data set will be managed by a data governance organization to ensure that stakeholders are empowered in the use of data. We will ensure strict security and privacy requirements are met, including compliance with personally identifiable information requirements. Our plan includes the key components of an Instructional Improvement System (IIS) - collaboration, formative assessment, actionable reporting, and targeted instruction - and supplements this with goal-oriented management of the improvement process through performance management tools:

- **Instruction:** The 21st Century Standards website to be released in February forms the linchpin of instruction in New Jersey connecting learning tools with a standards-aligned curriculum. Our proposal builds on that with a tool that supports teachers in action planning and targeted instruction. This system enables each teacher to develop personalized learning plans for students, based on summative and formative assessment data, and track the effect of the instructional plan over the course of the school year. The instructional tools will include curricular exemplars, online video support, and other teaching resources.
- **Assessment:** A formative assessment platform and item bank constitute key supports of the standards-aligned curriculum. The tools will allow educators to tailor formative assessments so that they are focused on observed student needs. Educators will be able to share items, assessments and student work relevant to classroom instruction. Allowing flexible collaborative development of instructional tools by teachers encourages the continuous improvement of the curriculum and assessment spine.
- **Reporting:** NJ SMART already provides statewide reporting on student performance. By incorporating a wider range of assessments and other data, focusing reporting to support the practices of the target audience - teachers, principals, administrators, and policy makers- and ensuring that the reports give relevant, actionable data, the results of assessments will be seen in context. These data are presented for individual students, classes, and cohorts, aggregated with historical data for the student population in a goal-oriented or flexible parameterized manner. More sophisticated users will be able to access full ad hoc reporting facilities.
- **Performance Management:** Performance management will offer planning tools to manage goals, measure progress, and direct improvement: (a) at the administrator level, a tool targeted at collaborative school improvement programs offered through the existing State Portal; (b) at the educator level, tools for professional development aligned with the standards-aligned curriculum, building on the Teacher Certification Database; and (c) at the student level, goal-oriented learning and career plans developed using the Personalized Learning Plan tool already being piloted at several schools.

Among other contributions, the LEA will be expected to support this work by assuring the adoption and integration of the IIS by educators and stakeholders, and necessary training of local personnel on the system.

Assurance: Develop Outstanding Teachers and Leaders

New Jersey has laid the foundation to support and develop a cadre of outstanding teachers and leaders with its efforts including its Creating 21st Century Schools: The Statewide Systemic Model for Continuous Professional Learning and Growth. We will build upon New Jersey's blended model of professional learning that includes onsite and online opportunities.

Our plan includes:

- **Consistent, Transparent Evaluation and Observation:** We will design and implement a comprehensive model of classroom observation and professional evaluation of both principals and teachers in a collaborative manner involving teachers, principals, higher education institutions and other stakeholders. The evaluation model will include multiple evidence-based empirical measures of which student performance growth will be a significant component. New Jersey will convene a state-level design and review committee to engage teachers, school leaders, and participating districts in the development and selection of performance metrics and of evidence-based classroom observation protocols.
- **Differential Professional Opportunities:** Professional development plans and other professional opportunities will be based on evaluation and performance data in participating LEAs. For additional responsibilities undertaken, commensurate compensation will be provided from state-level RTT grant funds. We will also create a model to support aggregate analysis of student growth at the building level, and provide performance bonuses for building principals and for school-wide teams.
- **Ensuring Effective Teaching and Equitable Distribution:** Both certification decisions (after a year of provisional teaching) and tenure decisions (after three years of teaching) will be explicitly determined based on evaluation results, which include performance data. We will also promote the equitable distribution of effective teachers and principals by improving the pipeline of high-quality teachers and piloting or scaling programs to fill gaps in high-need districts and hard-to-staff subjects.
- **Instructionally Grounded Professional Development:** We will support teachers and principals with instructionally grounded professional development focused on content that teachers teach with onsite support from early childhood through high school. New Jersey will train and deploy a cadre of highly effective teachers as skilled content-focused instructional coaches to support collective study of lessons, student work and students' formative assessment data. Participating LEAs will modify school schedules to provide common planning time for teachers to collaborate through networks to continuously improve their practice, and receive relevant feedback from master teachers on their actual classroom delivery.

Among other contributions, the LEA will be expected to support this work by establishing required policy changes (including, if required, modifications to the LEA collective bargaining agreement) to support the revised state-level evaluation system.

Assurance: Turning Around the Lowest Achieving Schools

Building on the solid work New Jersey has accomplished to date, we will continue to support LEA work in turning around the lowest achieving schools. We have identified the lowest-achieving schools based on standardized assessment data for all schools and persistence rates for high schools. An LEA may choose to implement any of the four intervention models supported by the U.S. Department of Education in a manner that is consistent with state law.

Our plan includes:

- **Rigorous Expectations:** If a persistently low-performing school selects either transformation or turnaround, it will have up to three years in which to demonstrate measurable progress in academic achievement and graduation rates. In the absence of sufficient progress, the school will be closed, reconstituted by the district, or restarted by an authorized charter school provider. These schools under new management will be required to serve up to 95% of the number of students enrolled in the closed school.
- **Planning Supports:** Where the district chooses to pursue transformation or turnaround, the state will facilitate the creation of an intervention team that includes outside experts and district personnel. The team will review recent analyses of root causes or conduct a new root cause analysis. It will also evaluate the school's climate to diagnose underlying factors such as student safety and attitudes about learning that may be impacting performance. The intervention team will recommend specific actions and programs to be implemented or eliminated to effect the greatest positive change in the shortest period of time.
- **Intensive Interventions:** Persistently low performing schools will institute comprehensive and substantive evidence-based reform designed to dramatically accelerate student achievement. A Chief Turnaround Officer will be assigned to serve as an instructional leader and administrative advisor to the school leader and teachers and will be charged with monitoring school progress on measurable benchmarks to improve both the school's learning environment and academic achievement. State required and supported interventions will include a complete curriculum review with prescribed evidence based and tested exemplar units to fill any gaps, additional structured instructional time in the form of a longer school day and year coupled with additional compensation for teachers, and build on the community engagement strategies recommended by The New Jersey High School Graduation Campaign report that recognizes struggling schools are part of struggling communities.

Among other contributions, the LEA will be expected to support this work by implementing longer school days and years for extended learning and negotiating commensurate compensation for teachers in persistently low achieving schools and by selecting and assigning highly skilled educators to develop and monitor personalized professional development plans.

Perspective: a Comprehensive Approach

We believe that the program philosophy we have outlined can be implemented across the state of New Jersey in a comprehensive way, thanks to a large-scale approach to professional development and the supporting infrastructure of a unifying technology platform. But organizational alignment across the state is just as important as these enabling methods and technologies. The broad range of stakeholders in public education – including parents, community organizations, local and state government leaders, teachers, and school leaders and the participating districts– will participate in the overall program to help it to succeed.

DRAFT New Jersey Participating LEA Memorandum of Understanding

This Memorandum of Understanding (“MOU”) is entered into by and between New Jersey (“State”) and _____ (“Participating LEA”). The purpose of this agreement is to establish a framework of collaboration, as well as articulate specific roles and responsibilities in support of the State in its implementation of an approved Race to the Top grant project.

I. SCOPE OF WORK

Exhibit I, the Preliminary Scope of Work, indicates which portions of the State’s proposed reform plans (“State Plan”) the Participating LEA is agreeing to implement. (Note that, in order to participate, the LEA must agree to implement all or significant portions of the State Plan.)

II. PROJECT ADMINISTRATION

A. PARTICIPATING LEA RESPONSIBILITIES

In assisting the State in implementing the tasks and activities described in the State’s Race to the Top application, the Participating LEA subgrantee will:

- 1) Implement the LEA plan as identified in Exhibits I and II of this agreement;
- 2) Actively participate in all relevant convenings, communities of practice, or other practice-sharing events that are organized or sponsored by the State or by the U.S. Department of Education (“ED”);
- 3) Post to any website specified by the State or ED, in a timely manner, all non-proprietary products and lessons learned or developed using funds associated with the Race to the Top grant;
- 4) Participate, as requested, in any evaluations of this grant conducted by the State or ED;
- 5) Be responsive to State or ED requests for information including those regarding the status of the project, project implementation, outcomes, and any problems anticipated or encountered;
- 6) Participate in meetings and telephone conferences with the State to discuss (a) progress of the project, (b) potential dissemination of resulting non-proprietary products and lessons learned, (c) plans for subsequent years of the Race to the Top grant period, and (d) other matters related to the Race to the Top grant and associated plans.

B. STATE RESPONSIBILITIES

In assisting Participating LEAs in implementing their tasks and activities described in the State’s Race to the Top application, the State grantee will:

- 1) Work collaboratively with and support the Participating LEA in carrying out the LEA Plan as identified in Exhibits I and II of this agreement;
- 2) Timely distribute the LEA’s portion of Race to the Top grant funds during the course of the project period and in accordance with the LEA Plan identified in Exhibit II and all applicable laws or regulations;

- 3) Provide feedback on the LEA's status updates, annual reports, any interim reports, and project plans and products; and
- 4) Identify sources of technical assistance for the project.

C. JOINT RESPONSIBILITIES

- 1) The State and the Participating LEA will each appoint a key contact person for the Race to the Top grant.
- 2) These key contacts from the State and the Participating LEA will maintain frequent communication to facilitate cooperation under this MOU.
- 3) State and Participating LEA grant personnel will work together to determine appropriate timelines for project updates and status reports throughout the whole grant period.
- 4) State and Participating LEA grant personnel will negotiate in good faith to continue to achieve the overall goals of the State's Race to the Top grant, even when the State Plan requires modifications that affect the Participating LEA, or when the LEA Plan requires modifications.

D. STATE RECOURSE FOR LEA NON-PERFORMANCE

If the State determines that the LEA is not meeting its goals, timelines, budget, or annual targets, or is not fulfilling other applicable requirements, the State grantee will take appropriate enforcement action, which could include a collaborative process between the State and the LEA or any of the enforcement measures that are detailed in 34 CFR section 80.43, including putting the LEA on reimbursement payment status, temporarily withholding funds, or disallowing costs.

III. ASSURANCES

The Participating LEA hereby certifies and represents that it:

- 1) Has all requisite power and authority to execute this MOU;
- 2) Is familiar with the State's Race to the Top grant application and is supportive of and committed to working on all or significant portions of the State Plan;
- 3) Agrees to be a Participating LEA as defined in the application and will implement those portions of the State Plan indicated in the State Plan, if the State application is funded,
- 4) Will provide a Final Scope of Work to be attached to this MOU as Exhibit II only if the State's application is funded; will do so in a timely fashion but no later than 90 days after a grant is awarded; and will describe in Exhibit II the LEA's specific goals, activities, timelines, budgets, key personnel, and annual targets for key performance measures ("LEA Plan") in a manner that is consistent with the Preliminary Scope of Work (Exhibit I) and with the State Plan; and
- 5) Will comply with all of the terms of the Grant, the State's subgrant, and all applicable Federal and State laws and regulations, including laws and regulations applicable to the Program, and the applicable provisions of EDGAR (34 CFR Parts 75, 77, 79, 80, 82, 84, 85, 86, 97, 98 and 99).

IV. MODIFICATIONS

This Memorandum of Understanding may be amended only by written agreement signed by each of the parties involved, and in consultation with ED.

V. DURATION/TERMINATION

This Memorandum of Understanding shall be effective beginning with the date of the last signature hereon and, if a grant is received, ending upon the expiration of the grant project period, or upon written mutual agreement of the parties, whichever occurs first.

VI. SIGNATURES

LEA Superintendent (or equivalent authorized signatory) - required:

Signature/Date

Print Name/Title

President of Local School Board (or equivalent authorized signatory) - required:

Signature/Date

Print Name/Title

Local Teachers' Union Leader (or equivalent authorized signatory) - required:

Signature/Date

Print Name/Title

Authorized State Official - required:

By its signature below, the State hereby accepts the LEA as a Participating LEA.

Signature/Date

Print Name/Title

