



## **“Educational Race To Reform”**

As part of the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), \$110 billion in federal stimulus money was allocated for education. Of this amount, \$4.35 billion is being allotted to encourage public education reform through a competitive grant program entitled *Race to the Top* (R2T). The goal of R2T is to encourage and reward states that are implementing significant reforms in the four education areas described in the ARRA:

- 1-Enhancing standards and assessments to help students succeed in college and work;
- 2-Improving the collection and use of data to inform educators to advance instruction;
- 3-Enhancing strategies which recruit, develop, reward and retain effective personnel;
- 4-Turning around struggling schools.

On January 19<sup>th</sup>, Louisiana submitted its application, “[Louisiana Education Reform Plan](#)”, asking for a \$314 million share of the R2T money. Even though the state is competing against [40 states and the District of Columbia](#) for R2T funds, Louisiana has been identified as a strong contender due to reforms already underway.

### **The Competition**

Of the competitors, it’s estimated that about 15 states are expected to land some of the \$4.35 billion. Three or four winners are expected to be announced in April and more by September, 30, 2010. Due to the significant interest in R2T, President Obama plans to continue the challenge, requesting \$1.35 billion for the program in his FY 2011 budget.

The Race to the Top competition is voluntary. Participating school districts in Louisiana will have the opportunity to receive significant funding for the purpose of implementing comprehensive reform strategies district-wide. In Louisiana 28 of the state’s 70 local school districts and 56 independent charter schools voluntarily signed on as a Participating Local Educational Authority (LEA). Districts that chose not to sign on as a Participating LEA may choose to become an Involved LEA. Involved LEAs will have the opportunity to compete for reform dollars via the Louisiana Educational Best Practices Fund (LEBP).

### **Louisiana School districts taking part in “Race To The Top”**

Ascension	DeSoto	Jefferson	Orleans	St. John the Baptist	Vernon
Assumption	East Baton Rouge	Lafayette	Richland	St. Landry	West Baton Rouge
Avoyelles	East Carroll	Lafourche	Sabine	St. Mary	Recovery School District
Baker	East Feliciana	Madison	St. Bernard	Tangipahoa	
Bogalusa	Iberville	Monroe	St. Helena	Terrebonne	

State enrollment in the participating districts covers 48% of Louisiana's total student population and 52% of the state's "at risk" students due to low family incomes. More than 72% of the student population enrolled in these districts and schools participate in the federal free and reduced-meal program. The percentage of students participating in these meal programs is commonly used to measure poverty in a specific population.

Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) officials say statewide changes in education will take place whether or not the funds are granted. Christopher Meyer, Special Adviser to State Education Superintendent Paul Pastorek has said, "If we don't win Race to the Top, that's still the right reform plan for the state."

### **Awarding of Money**

The R2T grant period is four years. If Louisiana wins its requested \$314 million, a minimum of 50% would be sub-granted by the state Department of Education to LEAs based on the number of districts participating and the number of Title 1 students in each district. Additionally, Participating LEA's will be entitled to a preference for School Improvement Grants which could total as much as \$1.5M for the use of turning around eligible schools.

The other 50% of the money would be spent directly by the LDOE to support statewide programs that will primarily benefit Participating LEAs. These programs, such as a data system tracking student performance; education consultants or training, over time will help all districts and LEA's statewide. If the state does not receive its requested amount but receives a grant in the range projected (\$175 million), it is the intent of the state to provide at least \$100 million to Participating LEAs.

### **Points in Louisiana's Favor**

- **The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools first-ever ranking of state charter school laws put Louisiana at #9.**

The use and encouragement of charter schools make up 40 points of the R2T application's 500 point scale. Last year, the Louisiana Legislature voted to remove the cap on how many charter schools can operate in the state. State Rep. Walt Leger III, D-New Orleans sponsored the law, saying it was needed to help the state in its bid for "Race to the Top." Caroline Roemer Shirley, executive director of the Louisiana Association of Public Charter Schools said the ranking carries extra meaning because it was done by an independent third party.

State Education Superintendent Paul Pastorek notes that Louisiana's Recovery School District (RSD) and charter school program initiatives have significantly raised student achievement. After only two years of steady implementation in New Orleans, the RSD has generated double digit student achievement gains and become a national model for school turnaround. U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan praised the schools performance but later [apologized for asserting that "Hurricane Katrina was the best thing that happened to the education system in New Orleans."](#)

### **R2T Q&A**

**Q:** If Louisiana does receive R2T funding, what happens if schools in participating districts don't improve? Would the state lose money from the U.S. Department of Ed?

**A:** "Participating LEAs will collaboratively set performance targets during the grant – the expectation will be that these districts are realizing greater gains in student achievement relative to non-participating districts by the end of the 4-year grant period. Districts that do not meet their targets and do not properly revise their plans to do so could risk being removed from the program. USDOE could remove funding from the state, but we expect so long as the state and participating LEAs are implementing their plans with fidelity, we'll be fine." **Christopher Meyer, Special Adviser to State Education Superintendent Paul Pastorek**

According to the state's application, "Louisiana leads the country in the number of charter schools and the school choice options available to parents. Louisiana provides equitable funding between charter and traditional public schools and holds charters strictly accountable for program efficacy and student results in order to continue operation. This high bar of accountability has provided the conditions where Louisiana's non-selective charter schools outperform traditional public schools in the state in terms of student achievement results."

Many of the teachers in the RSD schools are from the national *Teach For America* project. According to Andy Kopplin, advisor to the organization's CEO, "We have 7300 teachers but almost ten percent of them are in Louisiana." Kopplin notes that due to the partnership with the state and fundraising from Louisiana citizens and foundations, "We are the biggest in terms of per capita impact; per capita concentration of teachers...more teachers in Louisiana per person than in any other state in the country. "



- **Louisiana's teacher preparation tracking program, *Teacher Preparation Value-Added Assessment Model*, received recognition from U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan.** The model reliably links growth in student learning to teacher preparation programs. The data has already resulted in teacher preparation programs being changed, one being discontinued and all programs being publicly reported on. "Right now, Louisiana is the only state in the nation that tracks the effectiveness of its teacher-preparation programs." Duncan said in December. "Every state in the nation should be doing the same."
- **Education Week magazine's "Quality Counts" ranks Louisiana 27<sup>th</sup> in the nation** for its public education policies and performance. The state's standards and assessments got third best in the nation.

Also cited in the state's [highlights](#) of its application:

- **Strong Accountability.** Since 2000, the state's accountability bar for acceptable student and school-level growth has risen four times. Each time Louisiana raises the bar, student scores also rise.
- **Comprehensive Longitudinal Data System to Link Teacher Performance to Student Achievement.** In 2009 Louisiana was ranked 2nd in the nation by the Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, for how it measures and tracks education progress.
- **Proven Teacher Advancement, Evaluation, and Compensation Model.** Louisiana continues to expand Teacher Advancement Programs (TAP), now active in 41 schools.

### Points that may count against Louisiana

According to [a January 21st Wall Street Journal article](#), the following items could count against the state in it's R2T competition:

- Gov. Jindal's backing of school vouchers in New Orleans. In 2008, Governor Jindal signed into law, HB 1347. This bill establishes the Student Scholarships for Educational Excellence Program to provide scholarships to eligible students to attend participating public and nonpublic schools.. The White House opposes vouchers.
- A request that school districts and teacher unions agree to the R2T application. The Louisiana School Board Association refused to sign off on the state's application as did 42 of the state's 70 school districts. The Louisiana Association of Educators, one of the state's largest teacher organizations does not back applying for the R2T grant citing concerns about new rules that would link teacher pay and student performance.

## Reforms

The following excerpts are from the [state's Executive Summary](#) of its Race To The Top application:

Participating school districts in the state's R2T application commit to making the following four reforms:

1. Ensure all schools selected by the LEA to participate in the reform plan implement rigorous standards and assessments.
2. Modernize data systems (if necessary) to increase data-driven decision making to increase quality instruction.
3. Embrace a broad strategy for recruiting and supporting top teachers and school leaders, distributing them in areas of high-need, and differentiating them based on effectiveness.
4. Intervene in schools that are persistently low-achieving (if applicable).

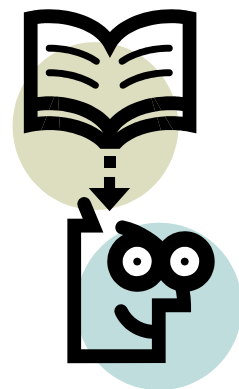
## Performance Pay

There are a number of reforms that must be adopted by each participating district, but the most significant reforms involve changing the evaluation procedures for teachers and leaders. Evaluations must be used to inform pay, promotion, professional development and retention, and 50 percent of the weight of these evaluations must be based on academic achievement of the students. These evaluations and their use must be transitioned into place over a reasonable time during the grant period.

## Principles of Louisiana's Education Reform Plan

As early adopters of *Louisiana's Education Reform Plan*, Participating LEAs will be the first districts to implement specific reform initiatives or operational policies which will advance the state's goals toward providing students a world-class education. Eventually, all LEAs will be responsible for meeting these goals. The state has prioritized the following eight goals as necessary towards providing world-class education; they resolve that Louisiana children will:

- Enter kindergarten ready to learn
- Be literate by 3rd grade
- Arrive in 4th grade on time
- Perform on grade level in English Language Arts (ELA) in the 8th grade
- Perform on grade level in mathematics in 8th grade
- Graduate on time
- Be prepared for and enroll in post-secondary education
- Achieve these goals regardless of race or socio-economic status (SES)



## Strategic Reforms

Through R2T, the state will advance a set of strategic reforms which will affect all LEAs, regardless of whether they agree to become a Participating LEA or not. These include:

- Enhance Louisiana standards through adoption of the Council of Chief State School Officers English Language Arts and math common standards. Also, improve science and social studies standards.
- Complete a longitudinal data system that will centralize all of the state's teacher and student data and ensure that the data is accessible to researchers.
- Complete a new data system that integrates all data sources at the LDOE, Louisiana Workforce Commission, Board of Regents and others to create an early childhood to workforce data resource. Additionally, create a web-based user interface for access to all of LDOE's data resources.
- Use student achievement growth data and other valid measures of teacher and leader practice to develop rigorous standards to measure the effectiveness of teacher and leader preparation programs. Using these standards, we will improve the quality of LA's teacher and leader certification programs by defining and implementing quality corrective actions for programs that do not produce effective educators.

## Concerns raised about R2T

<p><b>Performance pay requirement</b> R2T requires that 50% of teacher performance be based on student achievement growth within a school year. The other 50% will be based on evaluation by principal and peers.</p>	<p>Opponents fear teachers will be unfairly penalized for student failings.</p>	<p>Proponents say superior performance should be rewarded like it is in the private sector.</p>
<p><b>Puts control in D.C.</b> Participating states agree to goals and fiscal controls at the federal level.</p>	<p>Opponents fear the grant will diminish a community's control over its school district. BESE Board member Chas Roemer who opposes the state's participation in R2T says <i>"I worry that if we tie ourselves to a federal program; there will be many strings attached."</i></p>	<p>State Superintendent Paul Pastorek says the state's application, seeks to empower district and schools primarily through recruitment, training, retention and reward of highly effective teachers and principals. Pastorek also noted in a letter to the editor in <i>The Advocate</i> that taxpayers expect results when funding is distributed to any government agency.</p>
<p><b>"Unfunded mandates"</b></p>	<p>Many school districts that chose not to participate cited concerns about being able to sustain the initiatives after the <i>Race To The Top</i> grant money expires.</p>	<p>The state's R2T Executive summary notes that <i>"..sustainability of effective programs has been at the center of the LDOE's framework throughout the planning process"</i> and <i>"In some instances, undertaking these reforms actually leads to cost savings over time."</i></p>
<p><b>Encouragement of Charter Schools</b> Forty of the 500 points in the R2T application are based on a state's use and encouragement of charter schools. Charter schools are public schools that are opened to offer innovative teaching methods without much of the red tape found in traditional public schools. The number of charter schools operating in Louisiana has grown from 17 in 2004-05 to 77 in 2009-10. Type 5 charters account for 48. Type 5 charters are conversions of failing schools.</p>	<p>Some critics contend they have failed to deliver on their promise.</p> <p>Since charter schools are run independent of elected school boards, there is sometimes resistance to the loss of control plus loss of state education money that goes to charter schools.</p>	<p>Proponents point to a recent Stanford University study highlighting Louisiana as one of five states where charter schools outperform traditional public schools.</p> <p>Proponents note that charter schools must be authorized by local school boards and BESE and be held accountable or risk closure.</p> <p>The State Department of Education notes that neither it nor <i>Race to the Top</i> <i>"is suggesting charters are the panacea. Charter conversion is an option, not a requirement. And the department's current grant proposal allows districts to decide whether to participate, and, if so, whether to transition a school to a charter."</i></p>
<p>NOTE: On February 5, Governor Jindal announced that his administration will push a law change this legislative session to allow school districts and individual schools more freedom from state rules and regulations as they try to improve student performance. The proposal would allow public schools the ability to operate more like charter schools.</p>		

### **Related Links**

- Federal Race To The Top initiative information page  
<http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/index.html>
- Louisiana's Race To The Top initiative home page  
<http://www.louisianaschools.net/lde/r2t/index.html>
- The state's full Race To The Top application can be found at  
<http://www.louisianaschools.net/lde/uploads/15475.pdf>
- A document listing the key reform measures is available at  
<http://www.louisianaschools.net/lde/uploads/15616.pdf>
- Louisiana Department of Education Board of Elementary and Secondary Education  
<http://www.louisianaschools.net/lde/bese/home.html>
- Teach For America  
<http://www.teachforamerica.org/>
- Louisiana Association of Educators  
<http://www.lae.org/>
- Louisiana School Boards Association  
<http://www.lsba.com/>



Please watch "Educational Race To Reform" on *Louisiana Public Square* airing Wednesday, February 24th at 7 p.m. on LPB.

Let us know your thoughts on the state's Race To The Top application! Visit [www.lpb.org/publicsquare](http://www.lpb.org/publicsquare) and comment.