

About Race to the Top

The U.S. Department of Education established a January 19, 2010, deadline for Phase I applications. Through the federal Race to the Top competition, the U.S. Department of Education has challenged all 50 states to propose bold education reforms focused on helping struggling schools, elevating the effectiveness of teaching professionals and education leaders, building internationally recognized education standards and assessments, and improving state education data systems. Winners of the competition are expected to be announced in mid-April of 2010.

Florida's grant application addresses the following strategies:

Curriculum Standards:

- Adopt and implement national Common Core State Standards in English/language arts and mathematics as the new iteration of the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards, allowing for national comparisons of student achievement.
- Provide Web-based student tutorial tools aligned to the new standards.
- Create and build tools, such as performance descriptions detailing how particular elements of the standards can be tested for districts to aid in the adoption of the Common Core State Standards and to smooth the transition from the current Next Generation Sunshine State Standards to the new Common Core State Standards.
- Provide professional development tools and resources to assist in the implementation of new standards such as a shared resource of "Highly Effective Teachers' Instructional Materials" for use among districts.

Assessments of Student Learning:

- Create statewide tiered item bank for differing state, district and school level access for the development of interim assessments using high-quality test items in math, science and social studies.
- Conduct international benchmarking studies to establish a baseline that will compare Florida students' current achievement to those of their international peers.
- Provide formative assessment resources, including support for professional development to support high-quality classroom assessment aligned to the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards and the Common Core State Standards, once adopted.

Increased Use of Data:

- Create a one-stop shop of all Florida Department of Education data resources for use by teachers and district staff.
- Create training and professional development resources on how to use newly revised data-tracking system(s) for teachers, principals and administrators.
- Create training tools for districts to utilize as they teach additional staff about the use of this new data-tracking system.
- Establish processes to pre-populate applications with data already collected by the state to reduce time-consuming data entry at the district level.

- Evaluate current data collection to determine what additional reports could be provided to benefit districts, such as data that could influence local student interventions or demonstrate early warning signs.

Teacher and Leader Quality:

- In consultation with participating districts, develop better measures of student growth and learning gains for use by districts.
- Provide funding to support experts dedicated to the development and implementation of new evaluation systems in each participating district and methods for districts to evaluate professional development based on improved instructional practices and student learning outcomes.
- Establish a “Community of Practice” for participating districts to share best practices and monitor the success of district efforts as they develop local evaluation methods, professional development initiatives and other programs.
- Issue competitive grants for model teacher and principal preparation programs that support the equitable student access to highly effective teachers, especially in critical shortage areas.
- Secure an expert researcher in education human capital to analyze the effects of new evaluations, compensation and other initiatives on student performance, school performance and the education workforce, so that the efforts of districts throughout the state will inform Florida’s teaching profession as a whole.

Assistance for Struggling Schools:

- Devise external partnerships for teacher recruitment and school leadership development.
- Build district-level capacity to lead the school improvement process throughout districts and schools.
- Offer professional development for current coaches, department chairs, and lead teachers through a Differentiated Accountability Academy.
- In addition to reading coordinators, provide reading and science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) coordinators to assist districts throughout the state.
- Develop Community Compacts to engage business partners, family literacy programs and parent involvement in communities with struggling schools.
- Partner with national organizations to support expansion of alternative management options for low-performing schools.
- Promote education and college awareness in high-poverty communities through increased public awareness.