



Dear superintendents,

I am writing to update you on the status of Pennsylvania's efforts to secure up to \$400 million for our schools through the federal Race to the Top grant competition.

In a communication sent to you in early December, I requested that you initiate conversations in your community about Race to the Top and advise the Pennsylvania Department of Education of your district's potential interest in signing on as a Race to the Top participating district by submitting a letter of intent by December 18. I want to thank you for your efforts. Nearly two-thirds of Pennsylvania's 500 districts submitted letters of intent by the deadline. While I recognize that not all districts will choose to participate in the end, I am proud of Pennsylvania's education community for moving so quickly to engage in serious conversations about this extraordinary opportunity.

It is important to note that **even if you were not among those who submitted a letter of intent, your district can still be a participating district** provided you act quickly to engage your local education stakeholders.



Pennsylvania has to file its Race to the Top application with the U.S. Department of Education on January 19. That time schedule will require all of us to work together to ensure that Pennsylvania submits the most comprehensive and competitive application possible. We have done a tremendous job thus far organizing and planning under a tight timeframe, and I am confident we can make a strong push to the finish if we continue our impressive efforts.

For those school districts that have notified the Pennsylvania Department of Education of your interest in being part of the commonwealth's application, this document contains important information on the next steps you need to take. For those who are still considering whether your district will take part, it is not too late to get on board, and this document will detail how you can join us in this unprecedented opportunity.

– continued

– *continued from previous page*

Here's an overview of the critical next steps, which are more fully detailed within this document:

Careful review of expectations for participating districts – Over the next week, you should be reviewing the state's Race to the Top goals and the district's Memorandum of Understanding with the school board president, local union president and other critical stakeholders.

Memorandum of understanding (MOU) – January 13 is the deadline for each participating district joining in Pennsylvania's Race to the Top application to submit to PDE its memorandum of understanding, signed by the superintendent, school board president and local teachers' union president.

Formal filing of Pennsylvania's application – January 19 is the deadline for PDE to submit the commonwealth's Race to the Top application to the USDE.

Given the enthusiastic local interest we have seen thus far in Pennsylvania's Race to the Top efforts, I am confident our final application will reflect broad support among educators like you as we continue to build on our collective successes and create a world-class education system that benefits every Pennsylvanian.



A handwritten signature in green ink that reads "Gerald L. Zahorchak". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Gerald L. Zahorchak

Our Vision for Race to the Top

Race to the Top is an unprecedented opportunity to accelerate our academic gains and deliver on our commitment that all children in the commonwealth have access to an education that prepares them to be productive citizens and to succeed in a high-skills globally-competitive, knowledge-based economy. To successfully compete and win a Race to the Top award, Pennsylvania must demonstrate that we not only have a plan to effectively use dramatic new resources to implement school-based improvements never before possible on such a broad scale, but that we are prepared to hold ourselves accountable for the results that really matter – greater student achievement.

Pennsylvania's Race to the Top application will build upon the strategies and practices we have been using in our schools that have resulted in the important and significant gains in student achievement of recent years. While we have learned that there is no silver bullet in education reform, we know from our own work that when specific behaviors and practices are implemented and aligned in a comprehensive manner, the result can be the success of every child.

Pennsylvania's Race to the Top application is built around six primary objectives:

- Strengthening and expanding the standards-aligned system (SAS) and developing data systems capable of supporting reform
- Developing a world-class human capital pipeline for teachers and leaders
- Developing a multi-measure evaluation system for teachers and leaders
- Creating a coherent approach to professional development
- Turning around the lowest performing schools
- Evaluating programs to identify and spread best practices

Commitment to Raising Student Achievement

School districts that choose to participate in Pennsylvania’s Race to the Top application will commit to implementing a set of activities and reforms associated with these objectives. Most importantly, participating districts must commit to delivering results - significant gains in student achievement that will be measured and for which districts will be held accountable. The table below describes the levels of student achievement participating districts will be

expected to reach by 2014 based on where student achievement is today in each district. Addendum 4 of this document provides expected district-specific, district level student achievement gains. School building and grade level student achievement targets are posted on the PDE Web site at http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/american_recovery_and_reinvestment_act/17696/race_to_the_top_for_pennsylvania_schools/613085.

Delivering Results: Expected Student Achievement Improvement by 2014					
Expected Improvement – Math			Expected Improvement – Reading		
	If today your achievement level is*...	In 2014, your achievement level will be...		If today your achievement level is*...	In 2014, your achievement level will be...
Advanced	>50% advanced	66-90%	Advanced	>50% advanced	67-80%
	20-50% advanced	53-69%		35-50% advanced	56-68%
	<20% advanced	45-53%		<35% advanced	34-57%
Above proficient**	>70% proficient	86-99%	Above proficient**	>70% proficient	86-99%
	50-70% proficient	79-92%		60-70% proficient	82-87%
	<50% proficient	70-81%		<60% proficient	66-78%
Below basic	<10% below basic	0-3%	Below basic	<10% below basic	0-4%
	10-20% below basic	2-6%		10-20% below basic	3-7%
	>20% below basic	5-15%		>20% below basic	3-21%

* Based on the district average for the 2009 PSSA
 ** Above proficient includes both proficient and advanced

The Next Steps for Participating Districts

Careful Review of Expectations for Participating Districts

While the Department of Education’s December 4 communication provided an overview of the commonwealth’s commitment to effective reforms and outlined the expectations for participating districts, this document provides greater detail on our goals and expectations for participating districts.

Superintendents of participating districts need to work closely with the school board president and local teachers’ union president to review the state’s Race to the Top goals so that these local education leaders clearly understand the commitment that is being made and the results that are expected.

This review should go beyond simply discussing the mechanics of selected reforms and should also include the academic gains that are expected because of the reforms. The bottom line for our efforts must be raising student achievement. (See Addendum 4.)

The letters of intent recently submitted to the Department of Education served as a critical gauge of local interest in Pennsylvania’s Race to the Top program, but those districts that want to directly benefit financially from our application still must take steps to formally join the commonwealth as “participating districts” in our reform efforts.

As PDE informed districts in December, the Race to the Top application not only requires Pennsylvania to describe the initiatives and reforms that will be implemented at the state level, it also requires details on the activities to be implemented by:

- Participating districts; and
- Participating districts with turnaround schools.

All participating districts must agree to implement a set of reforms that are detailed in Addendum 1. If Pennsylvania receives a Race to the Top award, participating districts will have up to 90 days from the date of the award to submit a detailed, final scope of work, along with a budget and district implementation plan.

Additionally, a participating district with one or more turnaround schools must agree to select one of four school intervention models for each of their turnaround schools. These models are defined in the Race to the Top guidelines and include: (1) turnaround; (2) restart; (3) school closure; or (4) transformation.

The requirements and expectations of participating districts with turnaround schools are detailed in Addendum 1. Objective 5 of Addendum 1 details the additional requirements for school buildings that are part of Pennsylvania’s turnaround school initiative. For these districts, the final scope of work that will be

submitted to PDE 90 days after the date of a Race to the Top award must include a process and timeline for identifying a specific intervention model for each of those schools and its plan for implementation. Race to the Top requires that these schools select one of four intervention models:

Districts with Turnaround Schools must select one of four models for turning around these schools

Overview of the required elements	
Turnaround	Hire a new principal and replace at least 50% of the staff with highly effective teachers Hire a Chief Turnaround Officer to support the principal Implement a multi-measure evaluation system Implement a rigorous, research-based curricula Increase learning time Use student data to inform and differentiate instruction Provide appropriate socio-emotional supports
Transformation	Similar to the turnaround model without the requirement of 50% staff turnover Districts must agree to evaluate teachers using a multi-measure evaluation tool, reward school leaders, teachers and staff who have increased student achievement and remove those who have not
Restart	Convert the school or close and reopen the school under a charter school operator, charter management organization (CMO) or an education management organization (EMO) Require the operator to meet most of the requirements under the turnaround model
School closure	Close the school and send the students to a higher-performing school in the LEA Monitor the performance of affected students

Mandatory Information Sessions

The requirements for participating districts are serious and extensive. To ensure that districts are fully aware of these requirements, the superintendent of a district that wants to participate in Race to the Top **MUST** attend one of the following:

Superintendents of districts with turnaround schools: Attend in person one of the following two meeting sessions. These meetings will include a detailed review of the requirements for districts with turnaround schools.

Session 1

Thursday, January 7, 2010, 1:30 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.
Allegheny Intermediate Unit 3
475 East Waterfront Dr., Homestead, PA 15120

Session 2

Friday, January 8, 2010, 1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.
PaTTAN King of Prussia
200 Anderson Rd., King of Prussia, PA 19406

Superintendents of all other districts considering RTTT participation: Participate in one of the following three webinar sessions. You may access the webinars through www.pdewebinars.org. Locate the event entitled “Race to the Top – Participating Districts,” click on the Webinar Description button, and then click on the Register button. Advanced registration is not necessary.

Wednesday, January 6, 2010
9:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.

Wednesday, January 6, 2010
1:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.

Thursday, January 7, 2010
9:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.

Memorandum of Understanding

Any district that wishes to join Pennsylvania’s Race to the Top application as a participating district must submit a formal memorandum of understanding (MOU) to PDE by January 13. The final form of this memorandum of understanding for participating districts is attached as Addendum 2. For participating districts with turnaround schools, it is attached as Addendum 3.

In order to be a participating district in Pennsylvania’s Race to the Top application, this MOU must be signed by the superintendent, the local school board president and the local union president.

The MOU includes a preliminary scope of work that outlines the specific areas of reform the district is committed to pursuing. For districts with turnaround schools, this is the work described in Exhibit 1 to Addendum 3. For all other participating districts, this is the work described in detail in Exhibit 1 to Addendum 2.

Remember, **MOUs must be received by PDE no later than 5 p.m. on January 13, 2010**, via e-mail, postal service or private delivery service (FedEx, UPS, etc.). No faxes, please.

MOUs can be e-mailed to RA-RaceMOU@state.pa.us or mailed to:

Jackie Achey, RTTT
 PA Dept. of Education
 333 Market St., 10th floor
 Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333

The U.S. Department of Education will consider these MOUs when measuring each state’s local support for education reforms. The greater the depth and breadth of local support for a state’s Race to the Top reform plans, the better a state’s chances are of being successful in securing Race to the Top funding.

Formal Filing of Pennsylvania’s Application

The U.S. Department of Education has set a firm deadline of Tuesday, January 19, for states to file their Race to the Top applications. Each participating district’s memorandum of understanding must be included in this formal state application.

Because of this, **it is critically important that you submit your MOU to the Pennsylvania Department of Education no later than January 13.** There will be no extension of this deadline.

While the department is committed to working with any interested districts in having them become a part of Pennsylvania’s Race to the Top application, we will not be able to accommodate any requests to join as participating districts after January 13 because of the volume of work required to finalize and submit the state’s application by January 19. Moreover, because the time frame between January 13 and January 19 includes a weekend and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day, districts are encouraged to submit their MOUs as far in advance of the January 13 deadline as possible.

Revisions Made Since December 4

Dedicated Funding for Charter Schools

The Race to the Top guidelines require states to allow charter schools to participate in Race to the Top if state law designates charters schools as Local Education Agencies (LEAs). Charter schools are **not** LEAs under Pennsylvania law. While Pennsylvania law makes charter participation optional, the commonwealth has a strong commitment to expanding the role of effective charter schools. **Therefore, in our Race to the Top application, we will propose to establish a fund of up to \$5 million dedicated to supporting bricks-and-mortar charter schools that are, or have the potential to be, highly effective in improving student achievement.**

Specifically, bricks-and-mortar charter schools that currently have “Met AYP” status or have the ability to meet AYP by being in Making Progress, Warning, School Improvement 1 or School Improvement 2, will be eligible to take advantage of the dedicated charter school funding. Like districts, charter schools must submit the required MOU by January 13 and thus must commit to implementing all the same Race to the Top requirements as participating school districts.

Charter schools will **not** be eligible to participate in the turnaround school initiative. The funds for the turnaround school initiative will be concentrated only in traditional public school buildings with the largest concentration of struggling students.

Because qualified charter schools are eligible to receive funding in Race to the Top, a participating district’s share of the Race to the Top grant will **not** be included in a district’s charter school per student rate calculation.

The Race to the Top application process is extremely rigorous and requires that each planned intervention be supported by extensive research to prove the efficacy of the approach. The strategies that Pennsylvania will employ are intended to transform the delivery of education in school buildings. Therefore, while cyber charter schools will benefit from the resources offered to all school districts to improve teacher quality, instructional practice and student tracking, they will not be eligible to receive Race to the Top dedicated funds for charter schools.

Standard Application for Prospective Teachers

PDE will develop a statewide online marketplace where teaching applicants can fill out one standard application and easily apply for multiple positions. School and district staff will be able to view the statewide applicant pool and search by specific requirements as positions open. **Districts that choose to participate in Race to the Top will adopt and use the standard application.**

Professional Development in Rigorous Coursework

Districts participating in Pennsylvania’s Race to the Top application are committing to dramatic increases in student achievement overall. Delivering to students rigorous coursework is essential to achieving this objective. **Districts that choose to participate in Race to the Top will provide professional development to high school teachers in providing high rigor coursework (e.g., Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and dual enrollment).**

The Benefits of Being a Participating District

Each of Pennsylvania’s 500 school districts will benefit from the resources and tools PDE will make available using Race to the Top grant funding, but only participating districts will share directly in Race to the Top funding in exchange for implementing certain reforms.

Should Pennsylvania receive \$400 million in Race to the Top funding, at least \$200 million would be shared among participating districts, with allocations based

upon the Title I Part A funding formula and ranging from hundreds of thousands of dollars for smaller districts to millions of dollars for larger ones.

The table below outlines the possible range of funding available to participating school districts, based upon the assumption that 150 districts will formally join Pennsylvania’s application:

Potential award to districts if 150 districts participate, and PDE receives a total RTTT award of \$400 million

Estimated allocation to districts based on size and Title I allocation formula ^{1,2}

District Title I Part A grant levels (current year only)			
Number of students in district	Basic, Targeted, EFIG, Concentration	Basic, Targeted, EFIG only	Basic only
Greater than 10,000	\$3 million to \$8 million	\$1 million to \$4 million	\$300,000 to \$1 million
5,000 – 10,000	\$1 million to \$3 million	\$500,000 to \$1 million	\$150,000 to \$500,000
2,500 – 5,000	\$500,000 to \$1.5 million	\$200,000 to \$500,000	\$100,000 to \$200,000
Less than 2,500	\$200,000 to \$600,000	\$100,000 to \$300,000	\$100,000 to \$150,000

Turnaround schools will receive an additional \$700 - \$900 per student not included in this table³

¹ Allocations are based on assumptions about the number of participating districts, the potential award amount to Pennsylvania, and the method PDE will use to distribute funds; allocation levels are preliminary and are subject to change
² This table does not apply for Philadelphia and Pittsburgh
³ Turnaround districts that receive school improvement funds are expected to supplement RTTT funding with SI funding to pay for initiatives in turnaround schools

In addition to the funding received through Race to the Top, school districts also will be expected to leverage other federal and state funding sources available for the same and/or complementary reform strategies targeted in the Race to the Top. In particular, funds from Pennsylvania’s ARRA Title I School Improvement allocation will be available

only to those districts with turnaround schools which commit to Race to the Top participation. Other funds which can be leveraged to support Race to the Top activities include Pennsylvania’s Accountability Block Grant program and the Education Assistance Program.

Statewide Reforms Using Race To The Top Funds

Pennsylvania will use a portion of its Race to the Top award to develop a number of state-level programs, initiatives and strategies that can be used by all schools and districts in the commonwealth, regardless of whether they choose to be participating districts. These programs, initiatives and strategies include:

- Funding to support the expansion of Pennsylvania’s regional STEM initiative;
- State-funded professional development for Advanced Placement certification;
- Creation of a catalog of high-quality virtual coursework that will be available to Pennsylvania students;
- Creation of a state-level charter schools office that will establish innovation labs to provide support for highly effective charter schools, help identify and disseminate best charter school practices and assist districts in monitoring performance of charter schools; and
- State-funded professional development for English Language Learner (ELL) teachers.

Pennsylvania has made tremendous strides in raising student achievement in recent years, and Race to the Top presents us with a unique opportunity to accelerate and expand those gains. But we all must work together to make that happen.

Have Questions About Race to the Top?

The department stands ready to work with you in the next several days to help Pennsylvania put together our strongest application.

Should you have questions or need assistance in your local efforts to join Pennsylvania’s Race to the Top application, please e-mail ra-pde@state.pa.us or contact one of the following PDE staff based on the intermediate unit in which you belong:

- IUs 1 through 10: Jennifer Cleghorn, (717) 214-5433
- IUs 11 through 20: Beth Olanoff, (717) 783-6828
- IUs 21 through 29: Abby Smith, (717) 525-5988