

RTTT Steering Committee Meeting

May 16, 2011, 4:30 - 6:30 p.m.

The Rhode Island Foundation

- I. Welcome & Objectives
 - a. Welcome, *Colleen Jermain & Neil Steinberg, Co-Chairs*
 - b. Objectives of Today's Meeting, *Commissioner Gist*
 - i. Understand where we are.
 - ii. Understand Rhode Island's Race to the Top budget.
 - iii. Be aware of new communications tools.
 - iv. Generate specific action steps for follow-up after today.

- II. Understanding Where We Are
 - a. Implementation Update, *Commissioner Gist*
 - i. [See quarterly implementation update to Board of Regents, 6.2.11, sent to committee members by email]
 - ii. Q & A on implementation update
 - Does the U.S. Department of Education (ED) produce an overall report or summary document for how all Race to the Top states are doing?
 - ED has formed a "Reform Network" website for all grantees to share with one another.
 - ED is conducting analysis across states specifically in the areas of "Great Teachers and Leaders," "Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools," and "Community and Stakeholder Engagement."

 - Is there federal support to make sure we get the best candidates for our open Race to the Top positions? Where is there space for student feedback/ participation in Race to the Top?
 - Recruitment in some areas has been really successful and in other areas has been challenging. Hiring people with the right experience for the Turnaround Schools area is challenging – nationally there is a great need for people with the right experience. We have been successful in the educator effectiveness area (every position filled there). We did receive some technical assistance early on from ED, but we are conducting recruitment on our own now.
 - Student engagement: We want to have full student participation on the Steering Committee. In addition, Commissioner Gist is holding quarterly meetings with students. We are open to other ideas for how to best engage students.

 - Can you elaborate on the amendments that Rhode Island requested to its Race to the Top plan?
 - There were three amendments requested: 1) Regarding project guidelines if they differed from application – 6-month delays had to be documented; 2) Performance management system, redirect an amount beyond \$100,000 to support developing our performance management system with LEAs; and 3) State Board Exam project was replaced with Multiple Pathways through Virtual Learning project. All of these were approved and posted online:

<http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/amendments/rhode-island-1.pdf>.

- Will the metrics for performance management be the same across districts?
 - Yes, that is what we are trying to pull together through the Collaborative Learning for Outcomes (CLO) process.
- How has the response been to the Requests for Proposals(RFPs)?
 - At this time, some RFP responses are back and some are not.
 - Overall, we have received a sufficient amount of responses and are reviewing them as they come in.

b. Follow-Ups from February Meeting, *Colleen Jermain & Neil Steinberg*

III. Understanding Rhode Island's Race to the Top Budget, *Carolyn Dias, RIDE*

a. [\[See budget presentation to Steering Committee\]](#)

b. Q & A on budget

- Will local education agencies (LEAs) receive program implementation support from RIDE staff hired under RTTT, especially with regard to reporting?
 - RIDE has been mindful to construct efficient mechanisms for reporting and implementation at the LEA level.
 - For reporting purposes, we have integrated RTTT reporting with a familiar Web-based tool that LEAs already use. This Web-based tool was populated with the assistance of the Rhode Island Association of School Business Officials.
 - The coordination between new reporting requirements and the use of existing systems will hopefully expedite LEA ability to complete all reporting requirements.
- Do LEAs know the budgeted amount for each line item in the human capital development fund for each year of the Race to the Top grant? If yes, are they able to negotiate spending from this funding in the collective bargaining agreement?
 - The original budgets submitted by each LEA have planned for years one and two of the grant. Budgets for years three and four will require an amendment.
 - At the local level, each district will need to take into account allocations they are receiving through the grant with their own collective bargaining agreement. Many districts are looking at the language in their contracts to find out how they can support reforms.
 - The way the grant is constructed is very prescriptive and there are specific boundaries on how funds are invested. Each district has aligned their budget with their scope of work, which is clear about what the budget requirements are under RTTT.
 - In addition, there is some latitude with additional funding that districts may receive. For example, LEAs may be able to coordinate existing professional development (PD) budgets to allow a larger number of teachers to receive training.
 - We will make the budget template available on our website so that the public is able to see district budgets.

- Have measures for sustainability been budgeted into the grant, so that after the four years of Race to the Top, reforms are sustainable?
 - Yes, when the application and budgets were developed we were careful to plan for the initial investments to implement the systems being built. After the initial investment and development, the systems will only require maintenance. In terms of maintenance, some existing systems that are currently set up in Rhode Island are being eliminated and replaced with more efficient structures.
 - We are confident that systems will be completed on time and when the grant ends, implementation costs will be covered.
 - We will make it a priority to continue to work with LEAs on these investments and support them in any way that we can.

- Reimbursements are listed as part of the budget; are there concerns that LEAs will not have the money to front costs before reimbursement?
 - We do not anticipate this process being a problem with LEAs, as all federal grants are on a reimbursement cycle and LEAs are familiar with this procedure.

- Are all LEAs going to have access to PD dollars for the educator evaluation system?
 - Yes, requests for PD funding were put into applications and district scopes of work. There are currently two evaluation models being developed in Rhode Island. For the districts that are working with the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) on an evaluation model, those parameters have been budgeted into years one and two. If the Rhode Island Model and AFT Model do not merge, for those districts working with AFT, there will be a process to access RTTT PD funding (an amendment request).

- Is the state able to ensure that districts have proper programs in place to lessen the data collection and reporting burden on LEAs?
 - We are in the beginning stages of conducting a gap analysis that will allow us to be able to determine district capacity.
 - In terms of collecting data through new data platforms, we are analyzing what information LEAs need to provide for the state's data requests. We are working with LEAs to match and adapt to all types of data software and problem-solve in districts where adaptation is difficult. All of this work is preparation for the introduction of the Instructional Management System.

IV. New Communications Tools, *Nicole Shaffer, RIDE*

- a. [See [Race to the Top Communications Plan](#), [Race to the Top Overview Document](#), and [LEA Engagement Strategies and Adaptive Challenges](#) online, and Race to the Top Talking Points sent to committee members by email]
- b. Q & A on communications tools
 - Are there plans to advertise Race to the Top in newspapers?
 - This is a great idea and has been added to our “potential supplemental communications activities” list.
 - It is suggested that this be done on a quarterly basis, particularly to communicate the budget highlights.

- Are you charging us to take these tools and share them with our colleagues?
 - Yes, that would be fantastic! We provided the Steering Committee with a few tools to assist you in communication around Race to the Top.
- Is there representation from a media source on the Race to the Top Steering Committee?
 - No, there is currently not a representative from the media on the Steering Committee. We would like to have more media cover the committee's work.
- Have you approached the Providence Journal to do weekly updates on Race to the Top? The press should be involved.
 - We try our best to highlight the successes to date under Race to the Top.
 - Information reported out by districts at the local level would be invaluable.
- Perhaps the celebratory tone of the talking points that were distributed should be softened in light of concerns held by NEA-RI.

V. Small-Group Discussion, *Committee*

1. *What is one idea/recommendation for enhancing or extending our Race to the Top Communications Plan?*
2. *What can you do, with your field/sector/profession/networks, to build commitment and support for Race to the Top in Rhode Island?*
3. *What tools or support would you need to carry out the strategies you've identified?*
4. *What can you, as an individual, do to be a champion for all Rhode Island students performing at high levels?*

VI. Report-Out/Wrap-Up

The following were comments and suggestions voiced by members of the Race to the Top Steering Committee in response to the four discussion questions:

- Members of the Race to the Top Steering Committee could host a series of informative meetings (with the Chambers of Commerce, parent groups, etc.) and seek opportunities to communicate with their own networks about Race to the Top. Some of the sessions could be presented similarly, while others can be tailored to the audience.
- Race to the Top communication should not always be coming from RIDE. LEA leadership should be communicating directly with teachers, students, parents, and their communities.
- Communication tools should be in parent- and business-friendly language.
- Assistance from local PR firms could be used to help generate information growth locally.
- Committee members felt that it was important to tie money to objectives and a focus on achievement when communicating Race to the Top projects.

- Race to the Top Steering Committee members believe they hold an obligation to communicate within their own networks, but there is also opportunity to cross-pollinate networks and sectors for added impact.
- Members would like to see regular data updates on Race to the Top goals.
- The ability to tell a story at a local level will help positively frame the work. Several members suggested we discover ways to “make it real.” In communicating, we will need to figure out how to best answer the following questions:
 - What is different because of Race to the Top?
 - What does Race to the Top mean to me (the parent, student, community member)?
 - How is it connecting to my school? In my classroom? In my district?
- When we talk about Race to the Top, it should be framed in a way that it is explicit about benefiting *everyone* in the state.
- The Steering Committee should make use of social media and other alternative media outlets.
- Including Race to the Top projects in legislative updates would be helpful in informing the legislative body.
- The Steering Committee could find an opportunity for teachers to highlight what they want and what they need in order to be successful in systems built under Race to the Top.
- The following were suggestions on the types of communication where attention should be focused:
 - Explanation that the systems invested in under Race to the Top are sustainable beyond the four years of the grant;
 - Clarification that there are clear restrictions in the budget and the grant is quite prescriptive;
 - Communication around the Race to the Top budget should be as simple as possible.
- Use student voice to advocate for the work that is happening in Rhode Island and stress that the implications for students are what make the work so important.