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THE RHODE ISLAND AGENDA FOR TRANSFORMING EDUCATION

An overview of how Race to the Top funding will accelerate progress

The Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (RIDE) believes that every student in our state deserves a great school supported by excellent teachers, a strong leader, and an involved community. With that support, we know that every student can achieve at high levels and make a difference in the world as a prepared citizen. Our strategic agenda for transforming education in Rhode Island outlines the hard work ahead of us as we make this vision a reality. We are using this agenda as the basis of our application for funding from *Race to the Top*.

President Obama is dedicating \$4.35 billion in federal grants through *Race to the Top* (R2T) to provide the resources that states will need to transform schools. We understand that R2T will not provide a silver-bullet solution; rather, it will support a comprehensive, strategic effort to build the capacity of the state, our districts, and our schools to advance learning for all students. R2T offers an unprecedented opportunity for our state, in partnership with districts and community leaders, to define, expedite, and bring to fruition the work that we have done, that is in progress, and that we plan to do to ensure that every school is on its way to performing at high levels. R2T also offers an opportunity for us to identify how the components of our strategic agenda -- **ensuring educator excellence, accelerating all schools toward greatness, establishing world-class standards and assessments, developing user-friendly data systems, and investing our resources wisely** -- work together to strengthen *all* schools. Our challenge will be to provide a continuum of support and resources, so as to ensure that every student attends a high-performing school.

Rhode Island is developing its proposal to enter the national competition for R2T funds. We are doing everything possible to make the most compelling argument that Rhode Island is a smart investment. Having the right ideas is important, but ideas alone do not ensure success. To win R2T funds for Rhode Island, we must document that we have the will and conviction to do whatever it takes to make sure that our students are well supported, our teachers and education leaders are highly effective, and our community understands why we must prepare our children to succeed in a high-technology, global economy.

Purpose and Objectives

As we work to ensure that Rhode Island has the very best education system possible, R2T offers the essential resources to bring us closer to our goal. We envision an education system that dramatically improves our persistently struggling schools, expects more from our moderately performing schools, and pushes our high-performing schools into excellence. There is no room for complacency in this vision. Therefore, Rhode Island will use R2T funding to achieve these four objectives:

1. Turn around persistently struggling schools, in partnership with districts, using a blend of proven strategies in leadership, programs, organization, and student supports;
2. Close achievement gaps so that all students are on track to graduate from high school well prepared for college and challenging careers;
3. Help all schools build the infrastructure that inspired, expert educators will need in order to improve student achievement; and
4. Allow all districts to partner in a significant way as a **participating district** or to opt in to some of the initiatives as an **involved district**.

Ensuring Educator Excellence

We know that the single most important factor in the successful education of our students is the effectiveness of the classroom teacher. Every student must have excellent teachers. Every teacher must work in a school where the principal is a highly effective instructional leader. We also know that ensuring educator excellence requires thorough preparation, ongoing professional development, a high-quality system of supports, and candid and instructive feedback about performance. Rhode Island is committed to developing a comprehensive system to ensure that we have excellent educators in every school and classroom. This comprehensive system will improve preparation programs for teachers and principals, embed a supportive induction program for new teachers, put in place a robust system of evaluation that encourages continuous improvement and development, and document effective practices.

Opportunities we will have with Race to the Top funding:

1. Enhancing Educator Preparation and Selection:
 - Raise the bar for entry into educator-preparation programs.
 - Prepare more educators to work in high-need schools through partnerships with Teach for America and The New Teacher Project.
 - Evaluate the effectiveness of all preparation programs by connecting student and teacher achievement data to preparation programs.
 - Create a statewide, Web-based system for advertising all employment opportunities across Rhode Island.
2. Providing Robust Evaluations and Recognition of Educator Performance:
 - Create a robust evaluation system for teachers and administrators that includes multiple measures and significantly values student growth and achievement.
 - Establish a corps of Master Teachers to help implement the evaluation system and provide support to teachers who are not yet *Effective* or *Highly Effective*.
 - Require a plan that outlines professional development and sets benchmarks for any educator who does not reach the level of *Effective* or *Highly Effective* on his or her evaluation.
 - Identify mechanisms to measure student growth and, over time, to link student growth to the educator-evaluation system.
3. Improving Educator Professional Development and Support:
 - Establish a Rhode Island Leadership Academy to prepare principals to work in struggling schools as well as to support current leaders at the school and district levels.
 - Launch a program to mentor and support beginning teachers in participating districts.

Accelerating All Schools Toward Greatness

Approximately 47,000 students attend schools that did not meet all improvement targets for the 2008-09 school year. Of that group, 19,000 students are in schools that have missed one or more of their improvement targets for five or more years. The test results for most of these schools indicate that less than half of the students are reaching proficiency in reading and mathematics. Rhode Island must and will transform these schools so that all students can be successful.

Opportunities we will have with Race to the Top funding:

Diagnosing Performance and Building Plans:

- Ensure that districts have the capacity to address the needs of Level I and Level II schools by coordinating work through the RIDE Transformation Office.
- Pursue more aggressive reforms with Level I schools that have missed targets for five or more years and are identified as *persistently low achieving*. Working with each district, RIDE will determine the best way for struggling schools to serve their students: closing and converting to a charter school, contracting with an education firm to manage the school, or transforming the school in more significant ways regarding staffing, program, budget, and schedule.
- Offer all Level II schools in participating districts the opportunity for a comprehensive diagnostic evaluation of the current school condition, leading to the creation of a strategic plan.
- Allow Level II schools to determine how to significantly improve student achievement while carefully monitoring performance to ensure that there is growth over time.

World-Class Standards and Assessments

Rhode Island has high standards for its students, but we want to be sure that we prepare our students to be internationally competitive in a global economy. Governor Donald L. Carcieri, the Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education, and Education Commissioner Deborah A. Gist are committed to ensuring that the Rhode Island standards and assessments meet this goal. To this end, they have agreed that Rhode Island will adopt the National Common Core Standards.

Opportunities we will have with Race to the Top funding:

1. Adopting High Standards for Students:
 - Align our curriculum, instruction, and assessment work with the National Common Core Standards in reading, writing, and mathematics.
 - Support the transition to the Common Core standards by holding public forums, working with higher education and business leaders to ensure that students have a seamless transition to postsecondary education and careers, and providing educators with professional development so that they understand the standards.
2. Building Comprehensive State and Local Assessment Systems:
 - Work in an expanded consortium of states to develop common statewide assessments that provide a quick return of results.
 - Develop pretesting and posttesting models in key subject areas.
 - Develop interim benchmark assessments to measure progress and to inform instruction throughout the school year.
 - Capture a model curriculum (in mathematics, science, social studies, and English language arts) through work with the Dana Center, and make this curriculum available to all districts.
 - Implement a Web-based instructional-management system that allows easy access to reports, curriculum, and local assessments.

Developing User-Friendly Data Systems

Rhode Island collects a lot of data, but educators seldom use the data to evaluate programs, inform instruction, or monitor how we invest resources. Therefore, we will build an instructional-management tool and a system of reports so that everyone is able to access information that will help them understand and improve education in Rhode Island.

Opportunities we will have with Race to the Top funding:

Building Data Systems and Training Educators on the Use of Data Dashboards:

- Develop easy-to-use data dashboards that provide information about state, district, school, and student progress and performance.
- Develop early-warning systems to ensure that we provide timely support to schools, educators, and students.
- Offer training regarding the use of data for such purposes as evaluating program effectiveness, determining instructional strategies, and examining how spending affects learning.