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NEWS RELEASE

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Rhode Islanders Unite in Support of Race to the Top 34 school districts, all charters and state schools, 11 teachers' unions sign the application

In a show of statewide support for the Rhode Island Race to the Top grant application, state leaders from the fields of government, education, and labor came together this morning (May 24, 2010) to endorse the ongoing initiatives to transform education in Rhode Island.

Governor Donald L. Carcieri and Education Commissioner Deborah A. Gist announced that 34 Rhode Island school districts, all of the charter public schools and state-operated schools, 9 of the Rhode Island AFT local school-district teachers' unions, and 2 local NEA Rhode Island unions have signed on in support of the Race to the Top application, which could bring \$75 million to Rhode Island to improve public schools. The NEA local unions have until tomorrow (Tuesday, May 25) to sign on in support.

"Round Two of the Race to the Top has given us an opportunity to fine-tune our original application, sharpen our strategies, and more fully engage stakeholders and the public in the process. As a result, we are submitting a much stronger application that reflects broader public input and collaboration," said Governor Carcieri. "With virtually every school district and public charter school pledging support, we are well-positioned to move our agenda forward. In particular, I would like to applaud Rhode Island AFT President Marcia Reback for her leadership in this round, and I commend the commitment of AFT districts throughout the state. We are certainly hopeful that more NEA locals will sign on in support by tomorrow as well. I also would like to thank Commissioner Gist and her staff for their hard work and outstanding efforts in preparing our state's application in both phases of Race to the Top."

"Due to our size, Rhode Island has the unique ability to take on cutting-edge initiatives and serve as a model for forward-thinking ideas and partnerships," said Congressman Jim Langevin. "I am proud that our state scored so highly in the first round, and I look forward to pursuing this second opportunity to bring more resources to the state."

"Commissioner Gist and RIDE have done a tremendous job in reshaping the proposal and enlisting the support of a broad coalition of organizations and individuals," said Gordon D. Fox, Speaker of the R.I. House of Representatives. "This application reflects our state's best joint effort and collective vision. The House of Representatives is committed to doing its part to ensure that every student in Rhode Island makes it to the top."

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“A quality education system not only contributes to the students’ quality of life, it is a critical component of Rhode Island’s economic future,” said President of the Senate M. Teresa Paiva Weed. “The most effective way to turn around struggling schools and close achievement gaps is by working together to bring about lasting reform. Our continued strong and united support of the Race to the Top grant is one example of our steadfast commitment to significantly improving education in our state.”

“The R.I. Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals appreciates the openness of the process in developing the Round 2 application and that the Commissioner incorporated four suggestions that the RIFTHP made,” said Marcia B. Reback, the union president. “The RIFTHP sees great value in advancing the creation of a world-class evaluation and support system that can be completed with the financial means made available through Race to the Top Round 2 funding, and we appreciate that the Commissioner has included the AFT Innovation Fund endeavor in the application as a collaborative effort between RIDE and the R.I. Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals. We see the aspects of professional development, curriculum development, and accessibility of data to inform instruction as real benefits to teachers.”

“From the outset, we have been committed to developing a highly competitive Race to the Top grant application with broad-based community support,” said Robert G. Flanders, Jr., Esq., Chairman of the Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education. “Today, we see that our plan has earned the endorsement of state leaders, educators, community organizations, teachers and teachers’ unions, parents, and students from across Rhode Island. Race to the Top is a vital element that will help us achieve the goals of our strategic plan, and I am confident that our application can bring \$75 million to Rhode Island to transform education in our state.”

“We are thrilled to be working in partnership with state and local officials, teachers, teachers’ unions, parents, and students to advance a mutual goal – to ensure an outstanding public education for our state’s students,” said Neil D. Steinberg, president and CEO of the Rhode Island Foundation. “We are proud of the process that has resulted in a stronger, better Race to the Top proposal that, when successful, will enhance educational opportunities for all Rhode Island students.”

“RISSA looks at this as a new beginning. We look forward to hearing some happy news in the near future from Washington notifying Rhode Island of being successful in receiving this grant award so that all of us can work together to achieve our goal of making the smallest state into the biggest and best in high-quality educational opportunity for all students,” said Colleen Jermain, president of the R.I. School Superintendents Association (RISSA). “RISSA looks forward to working together with all stakeholders in Rhode Island in making this goal a reality for all Rhode Islanders – students, educators, families, and communities – so that we are able to build a strong foundation for our state and local economies by graduating top-notch students who will build and lead a strong citizenry that supports and grows our world in business, art, and government and keeps our graduates here.”

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“I am proud of and grateful for the tremendous support we have received for our Race to the Top proposal,” said Deborah A. Gist, Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education. “I thank all of the educators, students, union leaders, and community members who volunteered their time to help us write the best grant application in the country. Thanks to your feedback, ideas, and participation, we have strengthened and improved our Round 2 application. This week, we will submit an application with bold reform policies *and* widespread support. Race to the Top funds will support our work as we continue to develop world-class standards and assessments, user-friendly data systems, excellent training and support for teachers and school leaders, and improvement strategies for our struggling schools. Working together, we will make Rhode Island schools the best in the country and the envy of the world.”

All school districts but Chariho Regional and Little Compton, plus all 4 state-operated schools and all 10 independent charter public schools have signed the Memorandum of Understanding as participants in the grant application. The local teachers’ unions signing on in support are, from the RIFTHP, Central Falls, Cranston, Coventry, Johnston, Lincoln, Pawtucket, Providence, West Warwick, and Woonsocket, and, from NEA Rhode Island, Foster and Glocester. Unions have until tomorrow (May 25) to sign on in support. (Note: Little Compton signed the Memorandum of Understanding but committed to only 7 of the 16 initiatives in the grant and therefore cannot be considered a participant in Race to the Top.)

Rhode Island was one of 16 finalists for Race to the Top Round 1, which the U.S. Department of Education awarded to only two states. Commissioner Gist will submit the Round 2 application to the U.S. Department of Education on Thursday (May 27). The U.S. Department of Education is expected to announce the Round 2 finalists in August and the winners in September.

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