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NEWS RELEASE

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Commissioner Gist Invites Public to Review R.I. Race to the Top Application Regents Endorse Grant Application Subject to Final Revisions

Education Commissioner Deborah A. Gist has invited the public to review the Rhode Island application for federal Race to the Top competitive funds and to offer feedback before the submission deadline.

Copies of the application will be available for review on Monday and Tuesday (January 11th and 12th), at the Shepard Building, Paff Auditorium, 255 Westminister St., Providence, from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education will provide forms for public comment and feedback.

This evening (January 7th), the Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education endorsed the grant application and authorized the chairman of the board to sign the final version.

“We think that we have a very good chance of being successful with this grant application, which could bring federal money to Rhode Island that we can devote to improving education,” said Robert G. Flanders, Jr., Esq., Chairman of the Board of Regents. “We have reached out to all the districts and communities, and staff members have been working to put together the best application possible. I am pleased that the Regents have endorsed it.”

“Race to the Top presents us with an enormous opportunity not only to secure needed resources to help us carry out reforms but also to push ourselves to act boldly and purposefully to enact the changes that our students need now,” Commissioner Gist said. “If we receive the federal funds – and I am confident that we will! – Rhode Island will be well positioned to transform our schools and to move our action agenda from vision to reality.”

The Race to the Top application includes many proposals on teacher effectiveness, the use of data in instruction, improving standards and tests, and turning around the lowest-performing schools in the state, including:

- building a data system to track the performance of effective educators in their classrooms;
- building a “gold standard” evaluation system, in partnership with unions and testing experts;
- state-led, high-quality professional development for all school leaders;
- an induction program to support new teachers regarding high-quality instruction, use of data, and classroom management;
- increasing the pool of effective teachers and school leaders to work in persistently low-performing schools;

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- recruiting charter-management organizations and other nonprofit organizations to manage schools that have been persistently low performing;
- removing limitations that hinder the opening of new charter schools;
- developing a model curriculum in language arts, social studies, mathematics, and science;
- encouraging and expanding alternate routes into the teaching profession
- training all educators in the use of data to improve teaching; and
- aligning Rhode Island standards with the internationally benchmarked Common Core standards by August 2010.

“Whether or not we receive these valuable Race to the Top funds, we will move forward aggressively with our strategic plan to transform education in Rhode Island,” Commissioner Gist said. “The need for change is urgent, and Rhode Islanders are serious about building the best education system in the country.”

Race to the Top is a competitive grant that could bring up to \$100 million over four years to Rhode Island to improve education. After the final public review, Commissioner Gist will develop a final version of the application for submission to the U.S. Department of Education by the January 19th deadline.

To seek input and advice during the drafting of the Race to the Top application, Commissioner Gist held five public forums, which nearly 500 people attended, and she met with numerous groups of educators, parents, and students. She also convened a steering committee to provide guidance throughout the development of the application.

Several foundations have provided support to help the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education prepare the application, including The Rhode Island Foundation, the Nellie Mae Education Foundation, the Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

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