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Rendell Administration: Pennsylvania Named as Finalist in Federal 'Race to the Top' School Reform Competition

State Could Receive up to \$400 Million in Federal Grants, With Goal of Doubling Rate of Student Improvement by 2014

Harrisburg – Pennsylvania's strategies for improving public education have helped it emerge as a finalist in the highly competitive "Race to the Top" federal grant competition, Governor Edward G. Rendell and Education Secretary Gerald L. Zahorchak said today.

The commonwealth was selected as one of only 16 finalists from 41 applications submitted to the U.S. Department of Education. If Pennsylvania is among the winners that are expected to be announced in April, it could receive up to \$400 million in federal funds to support education reforms.

"Pennsylvania's emergence as a Race to the Top finalist is a direct reflection of not only the quality of the reforms outlined in our application, but also the effectiveness of the reforms that Pennsylvania already has undertaken," Governor Rendell said. "We are extremely pleased to be among the handful of states to make the cut.

"The Obama administration made it clear from the start that Race to the Top would be a highly competitive grant program, one that would strategically invest in those states and those reforms that are sure to bring about the most tangible benefits for our students and our nation," the Governor added. "In Pennsylvania, we have made tremendous gains in identifying what works and putting it into practice. Race to the Top funding would be a great catalyst in helping us continue our progress and further build on our student achievement gains."

In the coming weeks, Pennsylvania and other finalist states will meet with federal education leaders to present the case for their respective reforms. Race to the Top grant recipients are expected to be announced in April.

Pennsylvania's Race to the Top application proposes a combination of tools and strategies that will not only help struggling students and schools, but also benefit each of the nearly 1.8 million students in all 500 districts, Secretary Zahorchak said.

"We believe the vision outlined in our Race to the Top application can result in Pennsylvania doubling its rate of improvement in student achievement by 2014," the secretary said. "This will mean another 100,000 students attaining proficiency in math and reading and nearly 10,000 more students graduating each year."

Dr. Zahorchak said the strength of Pennsylvania's Race to the Top application is based not only in the reforms outlined, but also in the strong participation of local education leaders.

"We are confident about Pennsylvania's vision for education reform – a vision reflected in the collaborative involvement we have from scores of schools across the commonwealth - and we look forward to making our case for Pennsylvania to receive up to \$400 million to build on our great work thus far."

In order to participate in Pennsylvania's Race to the Top application, a school district's superintendent, school board president, and local teacher's union president were required to sign an agreement committing to implement required activities and to meeting student achievement targets. Pennsylvania's application included agreements from 120 school districts and 59 charter schools.

Pennsylvania's application also included letters of support from more than 130 individuals and entities from across Pennsylvania, including federal and state lawmakers, mayors, business leaders and educators.

"The Obama administration emphasized that each state's Race to the Top application would be judged in part by the commitment of educators at the state and local levels, and our application was strong on both counts," the secretary said.

The Race to the Top grant competition represents the largest discretionary funding effort for education reform ever made available by the federal government - \$4.3 billion nationwide. The grants are not formula-based, but rather will be awarded to states that show the strongest strategies and coordinated commitments to reform.

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