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NATIONAL NEWS

Race to Top Consolation Prize: \$200M for STEM

Education Week

By: Michele McNeil

November 16, 2011

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2011/11/race_to_top_consolation_prize.html

The U.S. Department of Education has now [spelled out](#) what the nine runner-up finalists from [last year's Race to the Top competition](#) must do to get a piece of the \$200 million consolation prize.

This new money, which makes for a third round of the Obama administration's signature education-reform initiative, must be spent on programs aimed at improving science, technology, engineering, and math, or the STEM subjects. **UPDATE [5:26 P.M.]:** States must pick an existing project from their round-two plans. They can pick something that is entirely STEM focused, or a broader area that has a STEM element. For example, a state could decide to pitch a part of its plan dealing with recruiting new teachers, with a special focus on STEM teachers.

For states to qualify, according to the [rules](#) the department put out today, they must meet nine requirements or "assurances". For one thing, they must be in compliance with maintenance-of-effort requirements in the Education Jobs Fund, which already [means South Carolina](#) (if it had even [wanted the money](#)) wouldn't be eligible.

The state also has to be in compliance with certain requirements regarding its data system under the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund, a one-time pot of federal stimulus aid. (Could California be [in trouble](#) for this?)

There must also be no firewall between student and individual teacher data. Also, a state has to maintain any laws and rules that it used to beef up its original round-two Race to the Top application around teacher evaluations, school turnarounds, expanding charter schools, and adopting common standards and assessments. So no backtracking allowed.

In addition, the application must be signed by the governor, the state schools' chief, and the president of the state's board of education.

The funding comes from the fiscal 2011 budget deal Congress reached earlier this year. A separate \$500 million pot of money was set aside for an [early-learning version](#) of Race to the Top.

Awards will be based on the size of a state's student population, and will range from \$12 million to \$49 million. If every one of last year's finalists applied, [which isn't likely](#), this is how the awards would be broken down: \$12.25 million for Colorado, Louisiana, South Carolina, and Kentucky; \$17.5 million for Arizona; \$28 million for Illinois, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey; and \$49 million for California.

That's not a lot of money for so many strings attached, but, for states that are plowing ahead with the education-reform agenda they spelled out in Race to the Top, it might be easy money.

The application process will be in two steps. States have until Nov. 22 to file proof that they meet all of those assurances. If the Education Department agrees, then states have until Dec. 16 to make their pitches for STEM projects.

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Research Takes Center Stage At Congressional Hearing

Education Week

By: Alyson Klein

November 16, 2011

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2011/11/research_takes_center_stage_at.html

So you've heard a lot about the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. But there's this whole other law that gets much less attention: The Education Sciences Reform Act, which created the Institute for Education Sciences back in 2002.

Today, the House Education and the Workforce subcommittee on K-12 education held the first hearing on the reauthorization of ESRA, which has been pending since 2008. Sarah Sparks, of Inside School Research Fame, wrote a great [preview](#), and [tweeted](#) the hearing.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the politics of education research aren't nearly as charged as the politics of, say, accountability. The witnesses seemed to agree that the best thing the feds can do when it comes to research is to make sure that it's accessible and understandable for school district folks, but refrain from putting major requirements on it.

Another interesting point? Lawmakers from both parties didn't seem to have too many questions about issues at the heart of ESRA. But they did focus extensively on what kind of research exists on teacher quality and teacher evaluation—which is one issue that the House Education committee still has to tackle as it works towards reauthorization of ESEA. I guess ESRA is sort of a bridesmaid of federal education laws.

Grover J. "Russ" Whitehurst, the former director of IES who is now a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, said that basically, if the federal role in overseeing research isn't broken, Congress shouldn't fix it.

And he said that when Congress does get all directive about what sorts of research schools should use (as in the case of Reading First and the School Improvement Grant program) the results aren't always so fantastic.

Another witness, Caroline Hoxby, a Stanford University economics professor and a former member of the National Board for Education Sciences, IES' advisory board; suggested robust research can help the feds decide which programs to fund during tough budget times.

A key question at the hearing: Is it the federal role to get schools to use available research? One witness, Eric J. Smith, the former chief of Florida schools, said that's a state responsibility. Rep. Rush Holt, D-N.J., countered that states and locals aren't stepping up to the plate on that front.

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New Round of Race to Top Contest Targets STEM Education

Education Week

By: Erik Robelen

November 16, 2011

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/curriculum/2011/11/new_round_of_race_to_top_contest.html

STEM education is getting a boost from the U.S. Department of Education in the latest round of the federal Race to the Top program.

If states want a slice of the \$200 million prize, they must develop plans aimed squarely at improving education in the STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, and math), my colleague Michele McNeil explains over at [Politics K-12](#). Apparently, only the nine runner-up finalists from last year's Race to the Top competition are eligible for an award this time.

Today, the Education Department [spelled out](#) the rules for applying in this, the third round of Race to the Top. To qualify, states must meet nine requirements, or "assurances". Based on a look at those requirements, Michele says South Carolina would seem to be out of the running. So that leaves Arizona, California, Colorado, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania.

Available funding will allow for awards ranging from around \$12 million to \$49 million, depending on state population, the department says.

The news comes as STEM education was a [big winner](#) last week in the second round of another Education Department competition, the federal Investing in Innovation program.

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Ed. Dept. Made Key Scoring Change in Latest 'i3' Round

Education Week

By: Michele McNeil

November 16, 2011

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2011/11/ed_dept_made_key_scoring_chang.html

The [23 finalists](#) from the Investing in Innovation grant program are probably already counting their winnings (so long as they've secured their required private-sector match), but it's important to note the U.S. Department of Education made a possibly crucial change in scoring this year that may have altered who made it to the winners' circle.

The department did not standardize scores to determine this year's winners, a change from last year's [first round of i3](#).

Wonky, yes. But an important change.

According to a department spokesman, feedback from the public indicated there was confusion over how the applications were scored last year, which, among other things, prompted the change. Count Politics K-12 as [among those confused](#) over the standardization process, which EdWeek blogger Sara Mead also called "[incomprehensible](#)".

The reason for standardization during the first round, according to the department, was to mitigate what can sometimes be big variation in the judging process between easy graders and hard graders. Standardization is a highly statistical process that makes sure some applicants aren't improperly penalized just because they got a bunch of hard graders (or vice versa). Standardization was not used in the department's other high-profile competition—Race to the Top, which garnered its own share of [scoring criticism](#).

An analysis by the Rural and Community Trust indicated standardization wasn't a big factor in determining the fates of applicants in the first round, though it [did have some effect](#).

Nonetheless, the department got rid of standardization. A spokesman told me the department then took additional steps to address concerns over the naturally human and imperfect process of judging, and how to balance hard and easy graders. Among those steps: Judges were given clearer numeric ranges to help them decide on a score, and the department limited the number of applications each peer reviewer judged.

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STATE NEWS

Chicago Public Schools expected to make it easier to apply to high schools

Chicago Sun-Times

By: Rosalind Rossi

November 16, 2011

<http://www.suntimes.com/news/education/8880065-418/cps-expected-to-make-it-easier-to-apply-to-high-schools.html>

Next fall, Chicago eighth graders may be able to use one application form to apply to a bevy of different kinds of public high schools across the city under a proposal approved Wednesday.

Chicago School Board members agreed to hire the Institute for Innovation in Public School Choice for \$390,000 to work out the mechanical details of a new centralized enrollment system that would begin with applications for fall 2013 ninth-grade and eventually extend to elementary school grades.

Currently, eighth graders can face five different application forms for seats at magnet, college prep, military, career and technical education, International Baccalaureate and open enrollment high schools.

The new process would narrow that down to just one application that would allow kids to list their high school choices anywhere in the city in order of preference.

The goal would be to give kids the highest choice that was available to them, although exact details have yet to be decided. Whether charter schools would use the centralized form also was not clear Wednesday, although charters in New York are currently part of that city's centralized application process.

The school enrollment process is "a mess" in many urban cities, said Neil Dorosin of the Institute for Innovation in Public School Choice. In Chicago, for example, it's not clear why some kids are accepted to neighborhood high schools outside their attendance area and others aren't.

Three economists working for the Institute — including one who figured out how to better match medical residents with hospital training sites — have worked with several districts, including New York City, Boston and Denver, on enrollment reforms that provide greater transparency to parents and allow districts to see which schools have the highest demand, Dorosin said.

Also Wednesday, Chicago School Board members agreed to hire Jadine Chou, a Chicago Housing Authority executive, as CPS Chief Safety and Security Officer for \$150,000 a year.

As senior vice president for CHA asset management, Chou oversaw the installation of 2,700 cameras on CHA properties. She is the first CPS safety chief in at least a decade not to be a former Chicago police officer. CPS spokeswoman Marielle Sainvilus said Chou "will bring a more holistic approach — and not just a policing solution — to every problem."

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Gov. Christie: New Jersey schools to use new rating systems

The Associated Press

By: Staff

November 16, 2011

http://www.nj.com/news/index.ssf/2011/11/gov_christie_nj_schools_to_use.html

SECAUCUS — Gov. Chris Christie said today his administration has developed a new system for reviewing and rating school performance for the state's annual schools report card.

The state's nearly 600 school districts will be classified in to one of three categories; "focus schools," the worst, followed by "priority schools," and the best will be called "reward" schools. It's unclear whether the best performing schools would receive any additional perks for achieving "reward" status.

Acting Education Commissioner Chris Cerf said the new system will better allow education officials to focus on the bottom 5 percent of failing schools and will allow for a "more sensible and nuanced way of talking about schools" which would lead to "more sophisticated and targeted intervention" by education officials for the worst-performing schools.

The reviews will compare schools to others with similar demographics, take into account performance on state tests over time, look at how well-prepared for college students are and at the achievement gaps between high- and low-income students.

The new system was outlined in the state's application for a waiver from some requirements in No Child Left Behind law, which critics say is too rigid and sets unrealistic standards. New Jersey was one of 11 states to apply for the waiver this week.

President Barack Obama said in September that states that do certain things such as develop better teacher evaluation systems can apply for waivers.

Making changes to the education system is now one of the Republican governor's most pressing policy plans. Christie wants to use public money to fund scholarships to send children in underperforming public schools to private schools, eliminate lifetime job protections that come with tenure for teachers, and paying teachers based partly on how much their students improve on standardized tests.

But those proposals have languished in the Legislature since he rolled them out a year ago.

"I'd like to get them moving much more quickly on it. They move at the pace they move on — I can only do so much," Christie said Tuesday while visiting Secaucus High School. "This work doesn't happen overnight. It takes months to forge compromise."

At the same time Christie was saying that he didn't expect things to happen immediately, his office was sending out news releases titled, "Recess is Over: Time to End the Year of Inaction By the Legislature," chastising lawmakers for stalling on his proposals.

State Senate President Stephen Sweeney has said he is willing to talk about moving tenure reform said he won't get rid of seniority rules. He supports merit pay, but for schools, not individual teachers.

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Tennessee considers changes to teacher evaluations

The Tennessean

By: Julie Hubbard

November 17, 2011

<http://www.tennessean.com/article/20111117/NEWS04/311160125/Tennessee-considers-changes-teacher-evaluations>

Changes could come to Tennessee's new teacher evaluation system over the summer, Commissioner of Education Kevin Huffman told the state legislature's Joint Operations Committee on Wednesday.

Stringent new teacher evaluations tied to student test scores kicked in this school year. Four months into implementation,

complaints include time spent on evaluations and whether principals rate teachers fairly or give out enough top scores.

Huffman said the state isn't backing off evaluations but will make [sensible](#) adjustments.

"Oftentimes, very good ideas and theory don't work out in their execution and implementation," said Committee Chair Sen. Bo Watson, R-Hixson.

But Huffman told lawmakers to expect changes once the Department of Education gathers teacher surveys and measures data to see whether high observation scores mirror high scores for student learning gains. The state also will weigh evidence comparing four evaluation models now used in the state with Memphis City Schools and Hamilton County, which are trying alternative evaluation models.

"If we aspire to have a perfect evaluation system, we will never get there," Huffman said. "We're not wedded to any particular model or system, but we are wedded to the concept of doing evaluations and having it count in a meaningful way.

"The tool itself is going to [change](#) based on all the feedback we get."

Less scrutiny

Teachers with top evaluation scores of 4 or 5 might see fewer observations by their principals per year, he said. That change won't take place this school year because the state needs baseline data.

And principals now required to observe every teacher in their school based on a lengthy checklist including everything from lesson planning to managing student behavior might have fewer categories next school year.

Observation categories deemed least relevant to improving test scores based on end-of-year data will be removed, he said.

Districts are encouraged to submit proposed tweaks to the state board or alternate models that districts feel are a best fit.

"If we can make it a [better system](#) and not be as burdensome and let teachers teach, we'll be better off," said Rep. Mike Turner, D-Old Hickory. "The morale is bad and we need to get back in the right direction and motivate teachers again."

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Arizona: Dual enrollment a popular option for high school students

East Valley Tribune

By: Michelle Reese

November 15, 2011

http://www.eastvalleytribune.com/local/article_dcc61036-0fd8-11e1-abd6-001cc4c002e0.html

More Arizona students are seeking out dual enrollment classes to get a jump on college credit and save on tuition.

Through dual enrollment, or concurrent enrollment as it is called in other parts of the country, high school students earn credits toward a diploma, as well as college credit through a local college or university.

Most East Valley school districts partner with local community colleges, including Tempe's Rio Salado College.

Rio Salado recently received reaccreditation from the national group that watches over dual enrollment schools. It is the only college in the state with that distinction. Representatives from the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships, which awards the accreditation, were in town recently to mark the news.

The group was created in the late 1990s in response to a movement toward concurrent or dual enrollment, said Rick Kemp, dean of instruction and partnerships at Rio Salado.

In order to teach a dual credit class, high school instructors must have community college credentials, Kemp said. Rio Salado offers training and planning to teachers in their partner schools.

Rio Salado was first accredited in 2004. Schools must be re-examined every seven years to determine that they remain at the high standard, said E.J. Anderson, director of dual enrollment at Rio Salado College.

This year, more than 6,000 high school students from Tempe Union High School District, as well as Dysart, Paradise Valley and Deer Valley unified school districts, are taking dual classes through Rio Salado, Anderson said.

Rio Salado offers 161 different courses to students at 41 partner schools, mostly public district schools. A handful of charter schools, as well as Xavier College Preparatory and Brophy College Preparatory, also work with Rio Salado.

"It's on the national agenda," Kemp said. "Several states now have dual enrollment type requirements in statutes."

Students, and their parents, see the benefit, Anderson said.

"We see a lot of growth in dual enrollment. Parents are looking for opportunities for students to increase the rigor in high school because that's one of the best preparations for college," she said.

It also provides some cost savings. Students pay tuition for credits earned through Rio Salado at the community college rate, currently \$76 a credit.

"Dual enrollment is seen as one of the best strategies for increasing college retention. They're better prepared because they have those credits. It gives them momentum to complete college," she said.

"Many of the dual enrollment courses could be termed honors or Advanced Placement-type courses," Kemp said. But a larger number of students are also enrolling because of the career and technical education course offerings, he said.

One of the largest participants in the program is Tempe Union High School District's Desert Vista High School, which offers between 60 and 70 classes for students to earn college credit, Kemp said. About 30 percent of the students there are taking dual enrollment classes.

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