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Foundation for Florida's Future, Key Reads: 01/03/12

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NATIONAL NEWS

How Much Will RTT3 Benefit STEM Education?

Education Week

By: Stephen Sawchuk

December 23, 2011

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/curriculum/2011/12/will_rtt3_benefit_stem_educat.html

All seven states that qualified for the third round of the federal Race to the Top competition [have won a share](#) in the \$200 million remaining, and all of them will be expected to address STEM fields.

The question on the table is just how far these changes are going to go where STEM is concerned. Remember, states primarily will use this money to implement part of their original Race to the Top plans—which means making progress in one of the core areas of the economic-stimulus legislation, such as raising standards, improving evaluation systems, or turning around low-performing schools. They don't actually have to spend it explicitly on STEM programming.

A [summary document](#) by the Education Department contains a few more details on what states plan to spend their cash on.

Some of the states, such as Arizona, plan to focus on STEM as they transition to the Common Core State Standards. Louisiana, the department says, has "embedded" STEM throughout its reform work. Illinois envisions a "public-private infrastructure" to support STEM integration across the curriculum, while Colorado and Kentucky will build on existing STEM efforts.

As you may be aware, the fiscal 2012 budget provided \$500 million for an additional round of Race to the Top. So far, Secretary Arne Duncan hasn't indicated whether this competition will support early education or K-12 reforms. But, in a conference call with reporters, he did hint that STEM would probably remain a focus area. "We'll probably continue to have that since we have so far to go in the STEM areas," he said.

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7 Runners-Up Finally Share (Much Smaller) Race to Top Prize

Education Week

By: Michele McNeil

December 23, 2011

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

Seven states that were runners-up in last year's \$4 billion Race to the Top competition will share a \$200 million consolation prize that will fund small pieces of their original plans, with many choosing to focus on implementing common standards and improving teacher evaluation systems.

The seven winners are: Arizona, Colorado, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. Their grants range in size, based on each state's student population, from \$17 million for Colorado, Kentucky, and Louisiana to nearly \$43 million for Illinois.

"These states are absolutely ready to do great things," U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan said in a conference call with reporters yesterday evening.

The announcement comes as the U.S. Department of Education has begun to raise the pressure on the 12 winners of last year's competition. On Wednesday, federal officials [cited Hawaii](#) for "unsatisfactory performance" on its Race to the Top grant and placed the state on "high-risk" status. That means the state will have to ask the department for permission before spending any more of its \$75 million, will face an extensive on-site review, and increased reporting requirements. The department's letter to Hawaii clearly telegraphed that the state is in danger of losing its grant.

Duncan said during the conference call that Hawaii's progress was "nowhere near" where it should be. "I'm less concerned about time frames and more concerned about momentum."

He said he talked to Hawaii Gov. Neil Abercrombie on Thursday, and that the state needed to ramp up its momentum in the early part of 2012 to make good on its Race to the Top promises.

"They are in danger of losing their resources," Duncan said. "This hasn't been a great year for Hawaii."

Hawaii aside, Duncan said he was still "extraordinarily pleased" with the progress of Race to the Top states in general.

The announcement of the latest, \$200 million in awards was surrounded by little suspense. The department made all nine runners-up from last year eligible to win this time around so long as they agreed to stick to the reform agenda they pitched last year, and demonstrated how the piece of their plan that they chose to highlight also benefited the STEM, or science, technology, engineering, and math, subjects.

Two other runner-up states [did not get a piece](#) of this smaller prize: South Carolina was ineligible, and the department determined that California submitted an "incomplete" application.

With just \$200 million to be split this time around—far less than the \$4 billion up for grabs last year—the fact that two states did not participate bumped up everyone else's prize.

The department has now awarded all of its fiscal 2011 Race to the Top money, and can turn to figuring out what to do with the nearly [\\$550 million Congress set aside](#) to extend the brand during fiscal 2012. Duncan has said [no decisions have been made](#) on how that money will be awarded. However, during last night's call, he made clear that he does want to use at least some of the money for districts, saying that Congress' decision to open up Race to the Top to the local level was a "great opportunity." He also said the money is an opportunity to focus more on early learning and STEM.

Awarding Race to the Top money to an additional seven states enhances the reach of President Obama's signature education-reform initiative. Duncan can say (as he does in the press release announcing the seven winners): "These seven states are now among 22 Race to the Top winners spread out across the country that are investing in key education reforms to prepare more students for college and careers." He also says that Race to the Top money now reaches 59 percent of the nation's students and 69 percent of all low-income children.

In addition to today's seven winners and the 12 winners of the original \$4 billion Race to the Top, there were [nine winners](#) of the Race to the Top early learning competition (including three new states).

Details on how each state will use the Race to the Top winnings can be found in [this department document](#). Among the highlights:

- **Arizona:** Plans to establish five regional education centers, support the transition to Common Core State Standards, and improve data systems to inform educational decision-making.
- **Colorado:** Plans to transition to college- and career-ready standards, improve educator effectiveness by providing statewide training to implement its new teacher-evaluation system, and continue with STEM integration.
- **Illinois:** Plans to create a group of "reform exemplars" among participating districts that will agree to meet a high bar for implementing a comprehensive set of reforms, build systems and processes to continue and sustain improved student outcomes for all participating school districts, and build state capacity to extend reforms statewide.
- **Kentucky:** Plans to focus on its "one-stop shop" technology support system for Kentucky educators and to scale up the AdvanceKentucky project, which is aimed at engaging underserved and underrepresented student populations in advanced STEM courses.
- **Louisiana:** Plans to implement a performance-management system statewide to measure teacher and leader effectiveness and increase professional development resources available for STEM teachers, and develop and deliver professional development modules aligned with the Common Core in mathematics, among other things.

- **New Jersey:** Plans to develop model curricula that will assist teachers and leaders in the transition to Common Core assessments; launch its newly created teacher evaluation system statewide and pilot a new evaluation system for principals; and enhance its charter school application review and renewal processes.
- **Pennsylvania:** Plans to expand student and teacher access to quality courses and instructional resources to improve student achievement, particularly in STEM subjects, and refine and implement teacher and principal evaluation systems that incorporate student performance results as a significant factor.

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Fiscal 2012 Budget: Teacher-Quality Programs

Education Week

By: Stephen Sawchuk

December 22, 2011

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/teacherbeat/2011/12/fiscal_2012_budget_teacher_qua.html

Now that Congress has completed its fiscal 2012 spending bill, let's see what's what on the teacher-quality front.

(If you want an overview on the bill, check out colleague Alyson Klein's great [scene-setter](#); at Curriculum Matters, Erik Robelen [has more](#) on the literacy, civics, and STEM programs.)

- Several of the teacher programs were effectively flat-funded at the same level as in fiscal 2011, including the \$2.5 billion state teacher-quality grants, otherwise known as Title II-A.
- The Teacher Incentive Fund, which helps states and districts develop differentiated- compensation systems, took the biggest hit, dropping from \$400 million to \$300 million. The Education Department had made major changes to this program to emphasize the importance of aligning teacher evaluation to the new pay programs, and officials recently indicated they want to make [yet more changes](#).
- Transition to Teaching, a program supporting career-changers to enter the profession, dropped from \$41 million to \$26 million.
- The Teacher Quality Partnership grant program, which doles out grants to universities, districts, and nonprofits to revamp teacher training and establish teacher-residency programs, was flat funded at \$43 million. There was quite a bit of concern among teacher colleges earlier this year when the president's budget proposed zeroing out the program, which would have prevented [existing grantees](#) from receiving continuation funding.
- The Obama administration got nowhere in its bid to [restructure the teacher-quality programs](#) into three new competitive programs. It has made this a core proposal in its budget request for several years running.

UPDATED: I'm told the bill also contains a set-aside from Title II to fund the Supporting Effective Educator Development grant program. Under SEED, some of the entities that lost federal funding, like the National Writing Project and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, can compete. [More on that competition here](#).

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Survey Finds Education Grantmakers Getting More Strategic in 2011

Education Week

By: Nora Fleming

December 30, 2011

<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/12/30/15grants.h31.html?tkn=QMQFprULTPKrizSfkrpolYFJwqJpiMW2%2BFcw&cmp=clp-edweek>

Philanthropies maintained consistent funding levels for education during 2011, on average, but were more strategic and deliberate with dollars, according to a new report on trends in education philanthropy.

The latest edition of the annual [report](#)  was produced by Grantmakers in Education, a Portland, Ore.-based membership association of 280 public and private philanthropic organizations that fund education. The association assessed 2011 trends and changes in education funding based on survey responses from 184 members varying in size and type.

In 2010, there was a jump in funding from the previous year, but 2011 funding levels remained fairly similar to those for 2010, the report says. Though philanthropic funding for education initiatives has grown in the past couple of years, funding levels still have not reached those from before the recession hit in 2008.

Instead of increasing overall financial support, the association notes, donors in 2011 were increasingly focused on supporting "new and emerging initiatives across the education pipeline." Hot-button areas for change in education, such as teacher quality and preparation and common standards and assessments, were of particular interest to foundations in 2011, as well as the STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics); expanded learning time and out-of-school programs; and 21st-century skills—all topics that have gained a lot of traction nationally.

The findings of the report, “Benchmarking 2011: Trends in Education Philanthropy,” are also consistent with what the Battle Creek, Mich.-based [W.K. Kellogg Foundation](#) has found this year, said Alandra Washington, the foundation’s deputy director of education and learning. One of the larger members of the association, the Kellogg Foundation finances education and other community initiatives that focus on promoting equity for needy children and improving their well-being throughout the United States and, in some cases, overseas.

The foundation funded 116 new education grantees in 2011, with grants totaling close to \$99 million.

Like other foundations, Kellogg has also been interested in targeting innovative ideas tied to education-system improvements for students deemed at risk of failure, Ms. Washington said. A teacher-training program in Florida and a parent-advocacy network in Detroit are among the examples.

“While we have particular focuses, we are always looking at new and innovative ways to approach our work and move the needle for children in poverty,” said Ms. Washington. She added that the foundation was pleased to see others placing a high priority on teacher quality and initiatives like community schools, both key components of Kellogg’s main interest areas in education: early-childhood education, school preparedness, and college and career readiness.

The previous Grantmakers in Education report found that funders in 2010 continued to view using their dollars for advocacy and reform efforts as important, particularly around these newer initiatives. For 2011, aligning dollars with advocacy remained an interest, but was not the biggest priority, the new report says.

According to Caroline Preston, a reporter with [The Chronicle of Philanthropy](#), a Washington-based news-and-information organization that tracks trends in philanthropy, some of the trends listed in the report seem fairly consistent with what her publication has found nationally across the field of philanthropy, not just in education.

Last summer, *The Chronicle of Philanthropy* reported that organizations had become more strategic with their limited dollars, giving preference to efforts that aligned with their goals. In some cases, that meant building a stronger, better-trained workforce, particularly for corporate foundations.

Ms. Preston said that while grantees these days are often itching to use foundation dollars to make up for budget shortfalls created by the recent recession, such aid is not typically the goal of foundations. Instead, many funders see their dollars as a way to support and test innovative strategies for reform that could be scaled up later with public funding, she said.

“Many foundations are reluctant to fill in budget holes, as their money is tiny in comparison to government budgets,” Ms. Preston said. “The big theme here is ‘do more with less’; foundations have to get a lot smarter with their dollars [today].”

But while the Grantmakers in Education report found funders in education were more intentional with dollars in 2011, a majority of efforts they supported—for the fourth year in a row—were focused on the unified goal of addressing deep disparities in education and improving opportunities for underserved, at-risk, and minority students. More than 90 percent of the philanthropies surveyed said they invested in that area, with six out of 10 committing major amounts, the association reported.

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STATE NEWS

Michigan to offer free tests to school districts to gauge preparedness of students

Associated Press

By: Staff

December 29, 2011

http://www.mlive.com/education/index.ssf/2011/12/michigan_to_offer_free_tests_t.html

LANSING — The Michigan Department of Education is offering a new, voluntary tool for school districts to gauge whether students are on track for college and careers.

The department is funding a two-year pilot project that will offer free tests to school districts. The assessments are geared to eighth and 10th graders.

The tests align to the ACT college entrance exam component of the Michigan Merit Exam.

The pilot program is voluntary. The scores from the pilot tests can't be used for federal or state accountability or ranking purposes. But they could provide information for schools to monitor how much progress their students are making toward preparing for college and careers.

The education department will provide details about how schools can participate in early January.

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Oklahoma: Students stand to benefit from teacher evaluation plans

The Oklahoman

By: Editorial Board

January 2, 2012

http://newsok.com/students-stand-to-benefit-from-teacher-evaluation-plans/article/3636197?custom_click=pod_headline_opinion-oklahoman-editorials

DESPITE finishing out of the money in the [Obama administration's Race to the Top grants](#), last year's competition spurred forward [Oklahoma's](#) new teacher evaluation system. We're excited about the prospects the new system will have in improving the state's public education system.

Senate Bill 2033 pledged that Oklahoma would have a teacher evaluation system based 50 percent on measurable subjective observations and 50 percent on measurable objective student performance data.

We support the state Education Board's recent decision to allow districts to choose among three systems for the 2012-13 school year, the first year of the evaluation system. The districts also will get a piece of \$1.5 million in funding for the system based on student enrollment numbers.

Oklahoma finally is joining a national trend of states adopting a statewide evaluation system. In the past three years, 32 states have made the change.

Board members debated primarily between a teacher evaluation model developed by [Tulsa](#) Public Schools over the past two years using a \$500,000 grant from the [Gates Foundation](#) and the Marzano Teacher Evaluation Framework, which is a national model developed by education researcher [Robert Marzano](#) and used in 27 states. A third evaluation system, Danielson's Framework for Teaching, also was considered.

While Tulsa Public Schools is invested in its evaluation system, [Oklahoma City Public Schools](#) has spent millions in federal grants implementing the Marzano model at underperforming schools.

Rather than rush into picking one system for the entire state, the board's decision will allow it to weigh the pluses and minuses of the three systems before deciding on a statewide system for the 2013-14 school year. The Tulsa system is the favorite, having been recommended by a 13-5 vote of a state commission tasked with developing the evaluation system.

State schools [Superintendent Janet Barresi](#), who favored the Marzano model, said the state board was being appropriately cautious in not selecting just one system for the first year. However, the decision was criticized by state [Rep. Ed Cannaday, D-Porum](#), a commission member who said allowing school districts to choose between the systems was not in the spirit of the law.

Whatever model eventually wins out, the stakes will be high for state teachers. The new law requires dismissal of tenured teachers who score "ineffective" for two consecutive years, who score "needs improvement" for three consecutive years or who fail to average at least a rating of "effective" over a five-year period.

Nontenured teachers will be fired if they score "ineffective" for two consecutive years or fail to reach tenured status after four years.

The law also changed how teachers can earn tenure starting July 1. The coveted status will be obtained only if a teacher scores superior for at least two of three consecutive years, or has averaged a rating of at least "effective" over a period of four consecutive years.

We hope the new evaluation process will help weed out ineffective teachers. Our children need the best teachers possible for Oklahoma to supply more college graduates and grade higher in education nationally.

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Charter School Advocates Look To Change Mississippi Law

Associated Press

By: Staff

December 29, 2011

<http://www.wapt.com/r/30098334/detail.html>

JACKSON, Miss. -- Republican control of Mississippi government could bring a new charter school law, and supporters are working on proposals.

Schools that are chartered get more operational freedom in exchange for agreeing to meet certain goals. Under current Mississippi law, only schools with subpar ratings for three consecutive years can be chartered, and only at parents' request. No school in the state has been chartered under those rules.

Opponents point to studies that show charter schools are no better than regular schools.

Charter school supporters want a more permissive law. But lawmakers will have to decide whether only the state will grant charters or whether others will also be able to create such schools. Also to be decided: whether to only convert failing schools or allow new charter schools to be founded.

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In Washington, Large Rewards in Teacher Pay

New York Times

By: Sam Dillon

January 1, 2012

<http://www.post-gazette.com/pg/12001/1200685-298.stm>

WASHINGTON -- During her first six years of teaching in this city's struggling schools, Tiffany Johnson got a series of small raises that brought her annual salary to \$63,000, from about \$50,000. This year, her seventh, Ms. Johnson earns \$87,000.

That latest 38 percent jump, unheard of in public education, came after Ms. Johnson was rated "highly effective" two years in a row under Washington's new teacher evaluation system. Those ratings also netted her back-to-back bonuses totaling \$30,000.

"Lots of teachers leave the profession, but this has kept me invested to stay," said Ms. Johnson, 29, who is a special-education teacher at the Ron H. Brown Middle School in Northeast Washington. "I know they value me."

That is exactly the idea behind what admirers consider the nation's most advanced merit pay system for public school teachers. This fall, the District of Columbia Public Schools gave sizable bonuses to 476 of its 3,600 educators, with 235 of them getting unusually large pay raises.

"We want to make great teachers rich," said Jason Kamras, the district's chief of human capital.

The profession is notorious for losing thousands of its brightest young teachers within a few years, which many experts attribute to low starting salaries and a traditional step-raise structure that rewards years of service and academic degrees rather than success in the classroom.

Many districts have tried over the last decade to experiment with performance pay systems but have frequently been thwarted by powerful teachers' unions that negotiated the traditional pay structures. Those that have implemented merit pay have generally offered bonuses of a few thousand dollars, often as an incentive to work in hard-to-staff schools or to work extra hours to improve students' scores. Several respected studies have found that such payments have scant effect on student achievement; since most good teachers already work hard, before and after class, there are limits to how much more can be coaxed out of them with financial incentives.

But Washington is the leader among a handful of large cities that are seeking a more fundamental overhaul of teacher pay. Alongside the aggressive new evaluation system that has made the city famous for firing poor-performing teachers -- more than 400 over the past two years -- is a bonus-and-raise structure aimed at luring talented people to the profession and persuading the most effective to stick with it.

"The most important role for incentives is in shaping who enters the teaching profession and who stays," said Eric A. Hanushek, a professor of economics at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University. "Washington's incentive system will attract talented teachers, and it'll help keep the best ones."

Under the system, known as Impact Plus, teachers rated "highly effective" earn bonuses ranging from \$2,400 to \$25,000. Teachers who get that rating two years in a row are eligible for a large permanent pay increase to make their salary equivalent to that of a colleague with five more years of experience and a more advanced degree.

Those rewards come with risk: to receive the bonuses and raises, teachers must sign away some job security provisions outlined in their union contract. About 20 percent of the teachers eligible for the raises this year and 30 percent of those eligible for bonuses turned them down rather than give up those protections.

One persistent critic of the system is Nathan Saunders, president of the Washington Teachers Union, who argues that the evaluations do not adequately take into account the difficulties of working in poor neighborhoods. He also says that performance pay inappropriately singles out stars.

"This boutique program discourages teachers from working together," Mr. Saunders said.

Several other big-city school systems have recently tried to break out of the mold of paying all teachers according to a single salary schedule.

In 2007, Denver enacted a merit pay system, which President Obama has praised but experts see as flawed. It gives larger monetary awards to teachers who earn advanced degrees than to those who significantly improve student achievement, though there is little evidence that students learn more when taught by teachers with advanced degrees.

The system in Houston, also adopted in 2007, defines classroom success so broadly that it rewards more than half of all teachers with bonuses. The amounts are smaller than those in Washington; the maximum possible bonus last year was \$11,330.

This fall, the Miami-Dade County School District gave one-time bonuses, financed with \$14 million in federal grant money, to 120 teachers. Eighty-four of them received \$4,000 each, and 12 got the top payout of \$25,000.

Karen Sutton, who teaches honors English at a Miami high school, was one of the 12.

"To have somebody say you've done a great job, that feels wonderful," said Ms. Sutton, 56, who is in her 23rd year of teaching in Miami and has a salary of about \$55,000. "But does it affect how I teach or whether I keep teaching? No. I've never thought, 'If I get a bonus, I'll stick this out.' "

Marta Maria Arrocha, who is 47 and teaches reading to fourth graders, was another \$25,000 winner, which she described as exhilarating. Still, Ms. Arrocha, who has been teaching nine years, said she "would tend to discourage students who say they want to go into teaching."

"I try to nitpick -- is this really what you want to do?" she said. "A lot of people look down on this profession."

Washington, like several other cities that have rolled out merit pay programs, first promoted the plan mainly by emphasizing the top compensation that someone could earn in a single year: about \$130,000 annually in salary and performance bonuses. But earning that much is rare if not impossible -- it requires the most experienced teachers, with the most advanced degrees, to have the best possible performance, something yet to be achieved.

Mr. Kamras, who helped design the Washington system, said he considered the most important aspect of Impact Plus to be the permanent increases awarded to outstanding teachers early in their careers, many of whom might otherwise leave the profession.

Take Mark LaLonde. At 32, he is in his seventh year as a social studies teacher at a high school in Washington. But he lives in Baltimore, where his wife works, and had considered working in the Baltimore schools to avoid the tiresome commute. But he gave up that flirtation after receiving the "highly effective" rating twice and having his salary increase to \$87,000 from about \$58,000 last year. He also earned a bonus of \$10,000 for two consecutive years. In Baltimore, the union pay scale suggests that he would be making in the low \$50,000s.

Jimmie Roberts, who is 28 and tutors slow readers, saw his salary increase to about \$75,000 in 2011-12, from about \$52,000 last year, in addition to receiving \$30,000 in bonuses over two years. The money and recognition, he said, helped dispel the discouragement he had felt having to work a second job, as a greeter in a wine bar on nights and weekends, to pay off college loans.

Ms. Johnson, the seventh-grade special-education teacher, received her highly effective rating -- and all the extra money -- because her students' test scores had improved significantly, and because administrators who had visited her classroom came away impressed.

"She'll get a class full of kids who are below basic, who can't read, and by the time they leave, they'll be scoring well above basic or proficient," said Remidene Diakite, the assistant principal at Ms. Johnson's school. "A big part of her success is she puts so much effort into figuring out her students and teaching to their weaknesses."

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