

Iowa to Compete for ‘Race to the Top’ Funds

In an effort to strengthen Iowa’s K-12 schools, the State of Iowa will be among the first to apply for the first round of grants under the new federal Race to the Top educational grant program.

The \$4.35 billion in federal Race to the Top funds (part of the federal jobs and recovery initiative) provide competitive grants to encourage and reward states that are creating the conditions for education innovation and reform, and implementing ambitious plans in four education reform areas.

According to the Iowa Department of Education, competition is open to an application from each state. It is expected that only a few states will receive Race to the Top funds. Iowa could potentially be awarded \$60 million to \$175 million to support improvements in Iowa’s educational system over the next four years.

Reforms Needed in Four Key Areas

In order to qualify, Iowa would need to implement school reforms as follows:

- Adopt internationally benchmarked standards and assessments that prepare students for success in college and the workplace;
- Recruit, develop, retain, and reward effective teachers and principals;
- Build data systems that measure student success and inform teachers and principals how they can improve their practices; and
- Turn around our lowest-performing schools.

Iowans -- parents, teachers, principals, and school board members -- are working together to provide input and support the application. Regional meetings will be held statewide to provide information.

Grants will be awarded in two phases. Iowa is applying in Phase 1. Phase 1 applications are due January 19, 2010. Awards will be made in early 2010. Phase 2 will open in late spring of 2010, with awards made by September 2010. Half of the funds awarded will go directly to participating school districts. The other half will be used by the Iowa Department of Education to build the infrastructure to support statewide implementation.

States that apply in Phase 1, but are not awarded grants, may reapply in Phase 2 with states that are applying for the first time in Phase 2. Phase 1 grantees may not apply for additional funding in Phase 2; they will receive full-sized awards in Phase 1.

Later this year, the U.S. Department of Education intends to announce a second competition of up to \$350 million for the improvement of state standards and assessments.