

# DEMOCRATS

for EDUCATION REFORM

**PRESS RELEASE**  
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## Chafee's 'Thoughtful Pause' on Charters Jeopardizes Race to the Top Funding

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**PROVIDENCE, RI** – The national education reform advocacy organization, Democrats for Education Reform (DFER) today called on Governor Lincoln Chafee (I-RI) to abandon his call to take a “thoughtful pause” on the development of new public charter schools. The continued expansion of charter schools was a stated goal in Rhode Island’s successful Race to the Top application (RttT).

“Rhode Island’s successful Race to the Top (RttT) application reflected a hard-earned consensus built over many months by House Speaker Fox, Senate President Paiva-Weed, Commissioner Gist, components of the labor community, as well as numerous additional education stakeholders,” said DFER Executive Director Joe Williams. “We would strongly urge Governor Chafee not to turn the clock backwards on such a significant accomplishment and recognize that any attempts to amend the application, including halting or suspending continued charter school growth in Rhode Island, will jeopardize \$75 million in federal funding for the State of Rhode.”

One of the hallmarks of Rhode Island’s successful RttT Grant application was a commitment to expand the role and accessibility of high-performing public charter schools. As stated in the state’s application, “the Commissioner and Board of Regents have committed to grow the number of high performing charters and other innovative schools as a key element of the *RIDE Strategic Plan* to transform public education.” Furthermore, “RIDE will move rapidly to recruit and select organizations to open high-performing charter schools.”

“It is important to note Rhode Island has not received its allotment of RttT to date. Rhode Island, along with other states will need to demonstrate progress for the money to begin and continue flowing,” stated Williams. “Reaching out to the Secretary Duncan to discuss suspending charter school growth in Rhode Island sends the message to the secretary’s office that Rhode Island is not committed to education reform or the promises articulated in their application for Race funds.”

According to the US Department of Education’s (ED) rules for a RttT Grant Amendment Submission Process “in the event that the ED determines that the Grantee is not meeting its goals, activities, timelines, budget, or annual targets, ED will take appropriate enforcement action(s), which could include... putting the Grantee on reimbursement payment status, withholding funds, disallowing costs, or exercising any available legal remedy.”

DFER believes if the state fails to grow the number of high-performing public charter schools, as called for in the *RIDE Strategic Plan*, it would constitute “a failure to meet a stated ‘key’ goal” contained in Rhode Island’s application.

“The time for a ‘thoughtful pause’ on this issue has come and gone,” Williams stated. “Rhode Island’s school children only have one chance to get an excellent education. Any additional delay would deprive real students of that important opportunity. As such, we would respectfully request you embrace the goals articulated within *RIDE’s Strategic Plan* and not leave tens of millions of federal dollars on the table at a time when Rhode Island’s public school students and teachers could use every penny.”

**- About DFER –**

Democrats for Education Reform (DFER) is a political advocacy committee, founded in 2007, whose mission is to encourage a more productive dialogue on the need to fundamentally reform American public education. DFER operates on all levels of government to educate elected officials and support reform-minded candidates for public office. DFER launched a Rhode Island branch in 2010. More information on DFER can be found at [www.dfer.org](http://www.dfer.org).

**- About Executive Director Joe Williams -**

Williams is a former newspaper journalist and author of “Cheating Our Kids: How Politics and Greed Ruin Education” (Palgrave/Macmillan, 2005). Previously, he covered the New York City school system for the New York Daily News. As an education reporter with the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, Williams won numerous local, state, and national awards for his coverage of the Milwaukee Public Schools and that city's groundbreaking school choice programs.