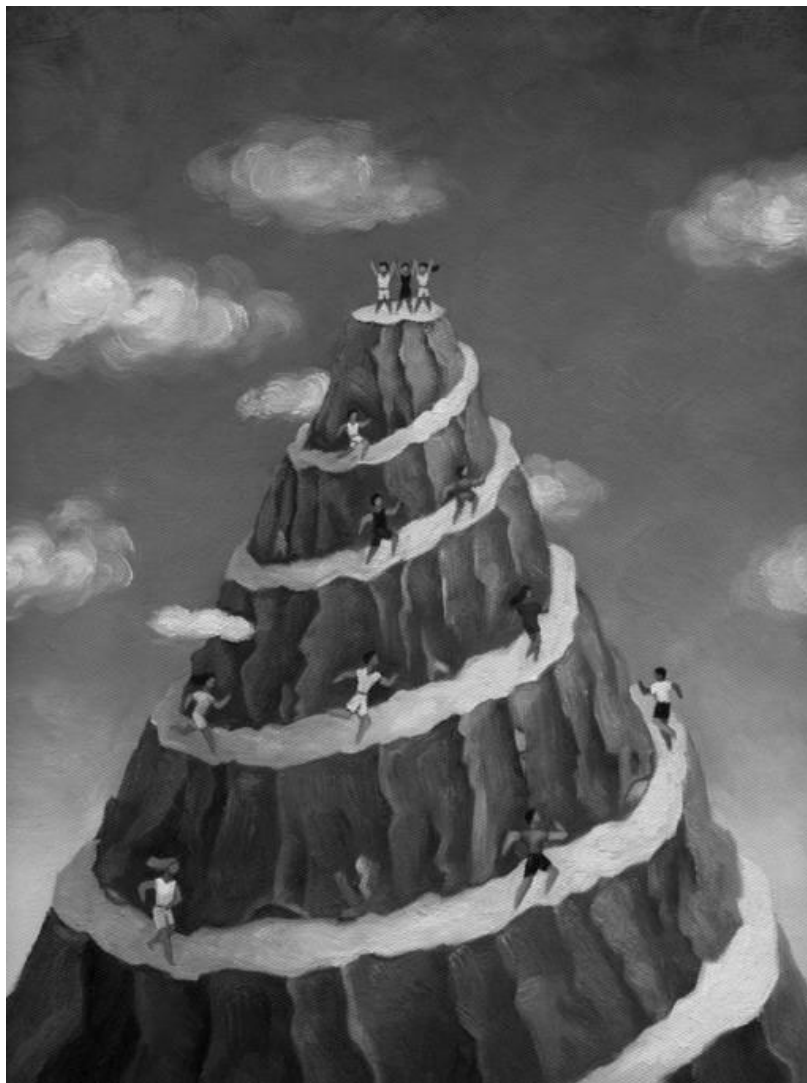


Racing To The Top:
American Recovery and Reinvestment Act
Issues Brief Series

#6: A Great Teacher For Every Child



DEMOCRATS
for **EDUCATION REFORM**

June 17, 2009

Dear Education Reformer:

This is the sixth in a series of issue briefs in which Democrats for Education Reform will present innovative ideas for Education Secretary Arne Duncan's \$5 billion "*Race to the Top*" initiative. (For more on the Race to the Top issues brief series go to www.dfer.org.)

The *Race to the Top* fund represents a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to take steps at the federal level to help bring bold, inventive, and effective reform models to scale across the nation.

We've never seen anything like *Race to the Top* in our lifetimes, whether it is judged by the size of the financial commitment or the sheer amount of ambition that comes with it. Nor are we likely ever to see another such chance to implement meaningful reforms at this scale. Indeed, the stakes are incredibly high. It is absolutely critical that we get this right.

The higher we set the bar on the *Race to the Top*, the more likely we are to enable those with proven approaches to expand their efforts, and in turn set the right example to which we expect other states to strive. This series will put forth some of the key components essential to a *Race to the Top* initiative that would truly live up to its title.

We look forward to continuing to work with our elected officials and advocates at all levels of government to advance these goals over the coming months.

Joe Williams
Executive Director

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A Great Teacher For Every Child

Studies have shown that teacher quality is the single most important correlate of student achievement; at the same time, it is the primary factor driving the achievement gap between rich and poor students, minority and non-minority students, and native English speakers and English language learners.

And yet, this is the area of school reform that has lagged farthest behind other accountability-driven efforts, the one that has been most resistant to change and the most intractable to solve.

Piecemeal, timid, and narrow efforts to address the teacher quality and equity issue have not worked. A real “*Race to the Top*” effort to improve teacher quality and equitably distribute good teachers therefore must be especially bold, aggressive, comprehensive, and systemic.

These are the some elements we think are essential criteria for *Race to the Top* states:

Data-Driven Reform

❖ Student-level data is used to drive policies that measure classroom- and school-level teacher effectiveness to evaluate teacher performance and inform professional development.

States that have erected a firewall between teachers and student performance for the purpose of evaluating teachers and informing tenure decisions, like New York and California, should be made to change their policies or be disqualified from receiving *Race to the Top* funds.

❖ Priority should be given to states that have in place, *and are able and willing to utilize*, a system that follows teacher performance and tracks teacher effectiveness from the time of completion of their postsecondary education and allows evaluation of both pre-service and in-service training.

❖ Classroom observations and other “process” evaluations of teacher effectiveness are necessary, but not sufficient, and should be absolutely free of bias, utilizing outside, objective evaluators rather than a teacher’s co-workers or principal.

❖ The state must have implemented the provision in the stimulus bill requiring transparency of the resource inequities between schools within districts that are driven by the inequitable distribution of qualified and experienced teachers, differences that are masked through the use of misleading district-wide per-pupil spending averages.ⁱ

Redressing Inequities Through Pay Incentives

❖ A Race to the Top state should be one that has created financial incentives, and strongly supported district efforts, to attract qualified and effective teachers to high-poverty, high-minority, and low-performing schools, particularly in the areas of literacy, math, science, special education, and English as a second language.

Such efforts should include signing bonuses, merit pay, and pay-for-performance.

Bright-Line Teacher Qualification Criteria

❖ The state has not attempted to cover-up the deployment of untrained teachers through the use of euphemisms such as “emergency,” “provisional,” or “pre-intern” certification designations.

Support for New and Novice Teachers

❖ Comprehensive measures are in place to support new teachers, including intensive induction programs and real, rather than nominal, mentoring by master teachers with a demonstrated record of effectiveness. New teachers should have lighter class loads to ensure ample time for professional development, lesson planning, and interaction with other teachers.

Districts that choose to assign teachers to low-performing schools but also provide requisite supports for success should be given preference in the “*Race to the Top*.”

Professional Development Best Practices

❖ The state has eliminated one-day or short-term workshops and instituted sustained, intensive, and classroom-focused activities that:

- ◆ Improve and increase teachers’ knowledge of academic subjects;
- ◆ Give teachers and principals the knowledge and skills necessary to help students meet state academic standards at a level of proficient or advanced;
- ◆ Guide practices that improve student achievement through broad, rich, and integrated curricula rather than “drill and kill” or test-prep;
- ◆ Are informed by, and evaluated based on, real-time data on the achievement of the students in each teacher’s classroom(s)

❖ The state has worked closely and entered into partnerships with human capital organizations that are building pipelines of teachers and school leaders who are selected, prepared, and supported in novel ways that demonstrably increase their effectiveness. Further, the state would have plans to now work with those organizations to take such

models to scale.

Robust and Sustained Intervention

❖ The state has made good faith efforts and can show substantial and measurable results in improving teacher quality and effectiveness and in remedying inequities in the distribution of good teachers should be deemed eligible for inclusion in the Race to the Top.

States that allow districts to “rubber stamp” evaluations by giving all or almost all teachers the highest evaluations (e.g., “exceeds expectations”) regardless of their students’ achievement levels or their success in managing their classroom should be disqualified from Race to the Top eligibility.

❖ The state has developed compliance plans for the use of ESEA Title II professional development funds with those districts that have not made significant progress in improving teacher quality and equalizing the distribution of qualified teachers pursuant to current Title I and Title II guidelines.ⁱⁱ

ⁱ ARRA requires that “Each local educational agency receiving funds available under this paragraph shall be required to file with the State educational agency, no later than December 1, 2009, a school-by-school listing of per-pupil educational expenditures from State and local sources during the 2008–2009 academic year: Provided further, That each State educational agency shall report that information to the Secretary of Education by March 31, 2010 (p. 67)

ⁱⁱ ESEA 2141 (c); ESEA 1119(a)(2)