

RACE TO THE TOP (FOUR ASSURANCES)

Over the last two weeks, Secretary Duncan delivered two of four major policy speeches on priorities for the "Race to the Top" Fund. Under the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act* (ARRA), states must offer assurances that they are making progress in **four critical areas of reform: adopting rigorous standards that prepare students for success in college and the workforce; recruiting and retaining effective teachers**, especially in classrooms where they are needed most; **turning around low-performing schools**; and **building data systems to track student achievement and teacher effectiveness**. States must report on their progress toward completing these assurances in their applications to receive formula funding under the \$48.6 billion State Fiscal Stabilization Fund (SFSF). The Department will evaluate states' success in meeting assurances when reviewing states' applications for competitive grants under the \$4.35 billion "Race to the Top" Fund.

First, on June 8, at the fourth annual conference of the Department's Institute of Education Sciences, the Secretary told education researchers that **supporting states' efforts to build warehouses of data on student achievement is a top priority**. "I am a deep believer in the power of data to drive our decisions," he said. "Data gives us the roadmap to reform. It tells us where we are, where we need to go, and who is most at risk." The Secretary specifically urged researchers to work on improving accountability models based on the growth of student test scores and developing fair models of compensating teachers and other school staff based on the achievement of their students. Ultimately, he added, the data should be used to ensure that students are on track to graduation and success in college. "Hopefully, some day, we can track children from preschool to high school, from high school to college, and from college to career," he stated. "We must track high-growth children in classrooms to their great teachers, and great teachers to their schools of education." FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE GO TO <http://www.ed.gov/news/pressreleases/2009/06/06082009.html>.

Then, on June 15, during an address at the 2009 Governors Education Symposium in North Carolina, the Secretary urged the nation's governors and state education leaders to continue the movement toward adopting **internationally benchmarked standards for K-12 education**. He also applauded the 46 states and three territories that agreed this month to develop common standards, announcing the Department will commit up to \$350 million of the "Race to the Top" Fund to support the states in the **creation of rigorous assessments that are linked to those common standards**. "With higher standards that are common across states, we can share best practices and collaborate on curricula," he noted. "We can learn together about how to improve teacher preparation and development so that far more teachers can help students master challenging standards. This can accelerate all of your [education] reform work." Regarding assessments, "You will create these tests. You will drive the process. You will call the shots," he said. "We just want tests that are aligned with rigorous standards and that accurately reflect what is happening in the classroom so that teachers, parents, and students can trust the results." FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE GO TO <http://www.edgovblogs.org/duncan/2009/06/higher-standards-better-tests-race-to-the-top/>.

The Secretary will shortly deliver two more major policy speeches. He will discuss turning around low-performing schools on June 22 at the National Charter School Conference (Washington, D.C.). He will discuss teacher quality on July 2 at the National Education Association's Annual Meeting (San Diego).

"Race to the Top" grants will be made in two rounds. States that miss in the first round may reapply for the second round. The Secretary has laid out the following timeline:

- late July 2009 -- the Department will publish a notice of proposed rulemaking in the *Federal Register*, inviting public comment for 30 days on the proposed grant application and evaluation criteria
- October 2009 -- notice inviting applications will be published in the *Federal Register*
- December 2009 -- Phase 1 applications will be due
- March 2010 -- Phase 1 grants awarded
- June 2010 -- Phase 2 applications will be due
- September 2010 -- Phase 2 grants awarded