

WISCONSIN RACE TO THE TOP: *Frequently Asked Questions*
Updated 5/14/2010

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I. General Questions

1. What is the Race to the Top program?

The Race to the Top program is a \$4.3 billion fund created under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. Of this amount, \$700 million has already been allocated. The purpose of Race to the Top is to provide incentives to states to implement large-scale, system-changing reforms that result in improved student achievement, narrowed achievement gaps, and increased high school graduation and college enrollment rates (USDE, 2009).

2. How long will a district have to participate in Wisconsin's Race to the Top program?

Upon receipt of the Race to the Top grant, a district that has signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and completed the work plan will have up to 48 months to expend the funds.

3. How many Wisconsin districts will be awarded Race to the Top grant?

The Department has not set a pre-determined number of grantees. Any district that submits its MOU by the deadline will be eligible for funds through the Title I formula. In addition, districts that do not receive Title I are also eligible to receive Race to the Top funds if they have submitted their MOU by the deadline.

4. Are there state requirements that a non-participating district must comply with as part of Race to the Top?

No – Only participating districts must follow the state reform plan.

5. Can districts work in consortia or through CESAs to implement Race to the Top requirements?

Yes – In fact, districts are strongly encouraged to work through CESA and draw upon state model programs. Collaborative efforts leverage economies of scales, reducing costs for districts, while creating a continuity of programs and interventions across districts.

6. May districts apply as a consortium in their Race to the Top initiative?

No - Districts must submit their individual district MOU and scope of work. However, districts are allowed to work in consortia with other districts and organizations, i.e. Cooperative Educational Service Agencies (CESAs) to implement the components of their Race to the Top work plan.

7. If Wisconsin is awarded a Race to the Top grant by the U.S. Department of Education, can schools then apply to the Department of Public Instruction for funds?

No - Individual schools can not apply for funds. If Wisconsin is awarded a Race to the Top grant, LEAs, by signing the MOU, are eligible to receive funding. Participating LEAs will submit their final work plan and any other required materials to receive their Race to the Top funds.

8. Does Race to the Top require each Wisconsin public school to create a school improvement plan?

No - Race to the Top does not require each school to create a school improvement plan.

9. Are there specific programs or models districts are required to use as part of their work plan?

No - Districts are required to implement particular reforms and meet certain quality standards, but may develop their own programs or contract with any organizations so long as the quality standards are met.

10. Is the Round 1 application posted on the web?

Yes – It is available online through the Department’s Race to the Top web page. The Round 2 application will be posted after June 1.

11. If Wisconsin receives Race to the Top grant, will the DPI provide training on the development of the district’s plan?

Yes - the Department of Public Instruction will provide training to districts and to stakeholders on the development of a district’s plan if Wisconsin is awarded Race to the Top funds.

II. Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

12. When is the district’s Race to the Top MOU due?

The district’s signed MOU must be received by the Department of Public Instruction *by 4:00 p.m. on Friday, May 21, 2010.*

13. What are important details for submitting the MOU to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction?

There are many important details a district should remember regarding submission of the MOU to the DPI. First, the MOU must be signed by at least an authorized LEA representative. Please note

that there are multiple places where the MOU must be signed. Second, the DPI must receive the signed MOU by 4:00 p.m. on Friday, May 21, 2010.

The signed MOU may be submitted to the DPI in three ways. First, the MOU may be submitted electronically to the department via the following email address: wirttt@dpi.wi.gov. Second, the signed MOU could be sent to the following address:

Jeff Pertl
Policy Initiatives Advisor & Federal Funds Trustee
Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
P.O. Box 7841
125 S. Webster St.
Madison, WI 53707-7841

Third, hand-delivered MOUs will be accepted until the stated deadline. Hand-delivered MOUs must be brought to the DPI Reception Desk located on the DPI's 5th Floor.

Faxed MOUs will not be accepted.

14. If a district does not submit their MOU by the deadline, can they still be considered as a participating district?

No - a district that does not submit the MOU by the deadline will not be able to receive the Race to the Top funds nor be considered a participating district.

15. If the district superintendent, school board president and local union leader don't all sign the MOU, can the district still apply?

Districts are expected to make every effort to secure signatures from the district administrator, school board president, and local union leader.

However, if a local district is unable to secure signature from all three parties, they may still submit an MOU, as long as it signed by at least one authorized representative of the school district. In that case, districts may be expected to secure signatures from the remaining parties during the final work plan.

16. Does every district who wants to participate in the Race to the Top grant have to sign a standardized MOU?

Yes – The MOU or letter of commitment is a standard form required by the U.S. Department of Education.

All participating districts will receive funding to implement reforms in the four core areas identified in Race to the Top.

However, each district will develop an individualized work plan that outlines the scope and breadth of the reforms they will implement.

17. If Wisconsin is not awarded a Race to the Top grant, then do districts still have to implement the reforms outlined in the MOU?

No – districts are only obligated to carry out the MOU if Wisconsin receives a Race to the Top grant, and they complete the final work plan.

18. If the federal government does not provide enough funding or a district changes its leadership, can it opt out of Race to the Top later?

Yes – If Wisconsin is awarded a Race to the Top grant, then districts will be notified of their local award and asked to complete the more detailed final work plan within 90 days. Districts will be encouraged to develop a final scope of work that capitalizes on Race to the Top funds. However, only districts that complete the final work plan and accept Race to the Top funds will be obligated to carry out the MOU.

19. Will the MOU be specific so boards will understand what they're agreeing to?

Yes – The MOU outlines the specific reform areas.

20. How much funding does the state expect, if Wisconsin is awarded a Race to the Top grant? How much can participating districts expect?

Wisconsin will be applying for \$250 million. At least half of this amount is required to go out to school districts using the Title I formula.

Race to the Top Grant funds are in addition to and separate from state or other federal funding allocations Under the Race to the Top Grant, participating districts will get either their additional share under Title I formula, an additional \$70,000 per district or an additional \$100 per pupil, whichever of the three is greater.

Participating school district funding amounts may be increased in the event that not all eligible districts opt in to participate.

Additionally, this base amount of funding does not reflect additional funding that is available for the 6 largest school districts.

21. Does Race to the Top replace a district's current Title I allocation?

No - Race to the Top funds will not replace a district's current Title I allocation. Race to the Top funds are additional funds to support innovative significant reform in the four core education areas identified in the ARRA. A district is encouraged to review how all of their state and federal funds could be budgeted to support their reform efforts.

22. Will Race to the Top funds be received in lieu of current funds, or will this money be in addition to districts current total allocations, state funds and title funds?

Race to the Top funds are completely separate and will be given to districts in addition to any existing local, state or federal funding.

23. Can Race to the Top funds be used to support current efforts?

Federal rules regarding the supplanting of funds do not apply to the Race to the Top program. As such, funds can be used to supplant or replace current efforts as well as be used to enhance or expand program efforts.

24. If the school board took action supporting the Race to the Top application in the first round, does the board have to take specific action this round? Or will the resolution from last fall suffice?

The Wisconsin Race to the Top Round 2 MOU has changed, and therefore districts must re-sign the new MOU. However, it is a local decision whether or not the board takes a formal action to endorse the application, or whether the superintendent simply signs on behalf of the district.

25. Who must sign the MOU? Do the Superintendent and School Board Rep have to sign and the Union is suggested to sign?

At a minimum, either the superintendent or board president must sign. The State strongly prefers that all three sign the new Round 2 MOU, since the Race to the Top competition awards additional points for securing signatures from all relevant parties.

26. Do the teachers' unions support the Round 2 MOU?

State teacher union leaders were actively involved in the Round 2 MOU creation process, and have endorsed the application. Their input and support has been essential.

III. Teacher and Principal Evaluations

27. Will districts be required to use student achievement data in teacher evaluations?

Yes – A rigorous, transparent, and fair evaluation system for teachers and principals is a vital element of education reform. See definitions of formative and summative evaluations at the end of this section.

28. Do district-developed comprehensive teacher and principal evaluation systems have to include an additional compensation system? If so, then will the state support the sustainability of the compensation system?

No – Comprehensive teacher and principal evaluation system do not require additional or alternative compensation systems. This element of the Round 2 MOU is optional. If this optional element is chosen, Race to the Top funds can be used to support compensation system for the life of the grant, but alternative support will need to be developed beyond the grant period.

Updated from the May 10, 2010 Webinar:

29. Is a district required to conduct both formative and summative evaluation of ALL teachers and principals in the first year of the grant? What are the requirements for subsequent years?

Under the Round 2 MOU, LEAs are required to conduct annual formative and summative evaluations for probationary teachers as determined locally by applicable collective bargaining agreements, and for probationary principals.

LEAs are required to conduct annual locally-determined formative evaluations for non-probationary teachers and principals, a summative evaluation in the first year a teacher or principal becomes non-probationary, and a summative evaluation at least every third year thereafter for non-probationary teachers and principals. (Wis. Stat. § 121.02(1)(q))

Depending on local bargaining conditions, the formative evaluation process should be implemented no later than August 2011. Specifics on implementation will need to be addressed in the district work plan.

30. Is the Wisconsin Race to the Top Round 2 application different from Round 1 concerning the formative evaluation section which provides districts with the option of career ladders, compensation alternatives, etc. instead of those items being required?

Yes, these activities are optional for districts. Districts should check the relevant boxes under either of the following scenarios:

- If a district already has the activity in place, they should check the box for that activity.
- If a district does not currently have the activity in place, but is interested in using RTTT funds to implement the activity, they should check the box for that activity of interest.

Definitions

Formative Evaluations: Are not intended for disciplinary purposes but can inform professional development activities and may lead to the implementation of individual plans designed to improve performance and instruction. Formative evaluations include the following as significant factors:

- Student growth and achievement data that result from assessments in core academic subjects administered to pupils under Wis. Stat. §118.30 and 20 USC 6311 (b) (3), provided the school board has developed a teacher evaluation plan through collective bargaining that includes all of the following:
 - 1) A description of the evaluation process.
 - 2) Multiple criteria in addition to examination results.
 - 3) The rationale for using examination results to evaluate teachers.
 - 4) An explanation of how the school board intends to use the evaluations to improve pupil academic achievement

- Evidence of student growth and achievement from locally developed assessments, portfolios of student work, grades, rigor of coursework (including dual enrollment, honors, AP or IB courses), and other measures deemed by the State to be rigorous and comparable across classrooms.
- Portfolio of teacher’s work or instructional artifacts
 - Classroom observations

Summative Evaluations: Per Wis. Stat. § 121.02(1)(q), conduct an evaluation in the first year and at least every third year thereafter to assess overall employment performance, which may be used for disciplinary purposes. This should include:

- A classroom observation
- A review of compliance with action steps created under the formative evaluations process.
- A review of compliance with district personnel policies
- Any other criteria allowed by State law.
- Multiple rating categories, which must include at a minimum “satisfactory” and “unsatisfactory.”

If performance is unsatisfactory, then an improvement plan shall be implemented. Progressive disciplinary measures may be taken pursuant to district policy.

- Performance improvement plans must clearly articulate: the specific areas of improvement, time frame for the plan, and defined outcomes. Opportunities for improvement shall be offered, which may include ongoing observation, mentoring, ongoing conferences, modeling, and professional development. Career transition benefits may be offered to employees that voluntarily choose to leave their positions.

IV. Miscellaneous

31. Will the Race to the Top Round 2 webcast be available for board members and union leadership to view afterwards to understand better what they are being asked to sign?

Yes, you can access the webinar at

<http://doamedia.wi.gov/main/Viewer/?peid=e484a5f7384e4443a25d6694a91052e5>