

Week of November 23, 2009



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A Race to the Top

Education in Missouri has been a popular topic in recent weeks, especially with the announcement that the federal government is inviting states to compete for a portion of \$4.35 billion in additional education dollars. This funding, which will be allocated through the Race to the Top (RTT) program, will help recipients launch major statewide education reform initiatives. I am happy to report that Missouri is fully committed to Race to the Top and many state officials are working vigorously to ensure that our state submits the strongest and most ambitious application possible.

The RTT competition is challenging states to create comprehensive plans for addressing four central areas of education reform. These areas are: developing standards and assessments, supporting instruction through data systems, cultivating great teachers and leaders, and turning around struggling schools. It's clear that just supporting the status quo will not suffice if Missouri wants to be on the receiving end of this grant. We are setting some tough—but ultimately achievable, and quite frankly, necessary—goals for ourselves, because we believe that this unprecedented opportunity will help us dramatically improve education throughout the state.

Our primary goals include having Missouri students rank in the top 10 among all states in educational quality, as measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and other national and international indicators; providing quality, universal early childhood educational opportunities to all 3- and 4-year-olds, measured by the number of children served and a kindergarten readiness assessment; recruiting, preparing and supporting effective teachers and leaders, measured by the number of qualified professionals entering the education profession, a demonstrated mastery of skills and competencies and improved student performance; and creating statewide knowledge of and respect for public education by improving the efficiency and effectiveness of our state's educational system.

Recently the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) held

a RTT forum in Jefferson City that brought together a diverse group of people with a strong interest in education to gather input on Missouri's education proposal. I attended the forum, along with several other individuals who have ties to the 31st Senatorial District, where we were given the opportunity to add our input to the application process. Participants from the district included Mike Slusher (Belton School District), Maggie Anderson (Knob Noster School District), Julie Blaine (Central RPDC), Ray Patrick (Missouri Association of Rural Educators), Gary Manning (Crest Ridge High School) and Michael Wright (University of Central Missouri).

States have two opportunities to apply for grants. The first round of applications is due Jan. 19, 2010, and we fully intend Missouri to make that deadline so we are in the first group for consideration. Initially, Missouri will be grouped with eight other states, based on student population, which would permit an application for approximately \$150 to \$250 million in RTT funding, though we could potentially receive more. First-round awards are scheduled to be announced April 2010. The federal government has made it clear that states receiving the additional funding will have led the way in reform and will light the path for the rest of the country to follow. If Missouri is to move into the top 10 among all states in educational quality, RTT funding will help us achieve this goal more quickly.

As chairman of the Missouri Senate Educated Citizenry 2020 Committee, I fully understand the importance of creating a long-term plan and challenging goals for education in this state. Missouri's economic future and the ability to compete nationally and globally are tied to the quality of our education and the preparedness of our work force. Though not all states will be successful as they Race to the Top, I believe Missouri has a strong chance to receive a portion of this funding, which will help us realize our goal of making the Show-Me State a recognized leader in education.

To learn more about Race to the Top or to follow Missouri's progress in the competition, go to www.dese.mo.gov/rt3. As always, please feel free to contact me or my staff with any questions or concerns at any time. We look forward to hearing your comments and suggestions and trying to answer any questions you may have. You can reach us by phone at 866-277-0882 (toll-free) or 573-751-2272, or by fax at 573-526-7381.

Senator David Pearce serves Bates, Cass, Johnson and Vernon counties in the 31st State Senatorial District.

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