

## Key Changes to the New Jersey Race to the Top Plan Based Upon Stakeholder Feedback

Over the last few months, we have collected valuable feedback from teachers, school leaders, superintendents, and education associations on our second Race to the Top application. Thank you for taking the time to share your feedback with us. Your recommendations continue to help shape and improve our plan.

As a result of this feedback, we have made the following changes to the State's Race to the Top plan.

### Educational Stakeholder Feedback

#### Collaborative Design of the Teacher and School Leader Evaluations

We know that evaluation system design requires the broadest possible insight. Teachers, school leaders, supervisors, superintendents, institutions of higher education and other educational stakeholders must be involved in the design of our evaluation system.

- The Commissioner will publicly announce the members of the Educator Effectiveness Evaluation Committee (EEEC) and task the EEEC with designing an evaluation system for teachers and school leaders in which 50% is based on student learning and 50% is based on measures of effective practice.
- **Educational associations representing teachers, principals, supervisors, and superintendents will be represented on this committee along with practicing teachers, school leaders, institutions of higher education, curriculum experts, parents, a student and other education stakeholders.**
- The EEEC will solicit ideas and feedback from interested individuals and organizations about how the effectiveness of teachers and school leaders might best be evaluated and will publicly confer with national experts to leverage experience with new evaluation systems. **New Jersey is committed to making this process inclusive and transparent.**
- The evaluation system will be piloted, thoroughly reviewed and evaluated before implementing in Participating LEAs.

#### Incentive Systems

We have heard significant concerns about awarding bonuses to individual teachers and teacher teams on the basis of student growth. This would be a significant change and any such change should be tested and thoroughly evaluated preceding wider usage.

- New Jersey will limit such bonusing to a pilot program for Participating LEAs interested in exploring compensation options that reward individual teachers, teacher teams, or the school as a whole for exceptional student growth.
- As part of the pilot program, **50% of the state-funded bonus will be used for professional development or program improvements** and the remaining 50% can be allocated to teachers, teacher teams, or school as a whole per the LEA's local decision.
- Evaluations of the pilot programs will be widely published. The EEEC will review the evaluations and be asked to recommend whether such bonusing should be permitted in additional Participating LEAs.

### Local Evaluation Measures

The evaluation of educator effectiveness should allow for the local development of measures, observations, and portfolios of effective practice.

- Fifty percent of the evaluation of school leaders and teachers will be based on multiple measures of student growth including state-funded and locally-developed assessment in non-tested grades and subjects. The remaining 50% will include local measures of effective practice.
- The EEEEC (described above) will develop and widely publish a set of evidence-based criteria for the measurement of effective practice. The EEEEC will also identify existing observation protocols, performance rubrics, and/or collection of teacher artifacts (lesson plans, portfolios) that meet these criteria.
- **LEAs may choose to (1) adopt the observation protocols based on the recommendations of the EEEEC or (2) develop local measures that meet the same criteria and are approved by NJDOE.**
- The New Jersey Department of Education will provide extensive professional development to teachers, school leaders, and superintendents to ensure that evaluation systems support teachers and school leaders seeking to continuously improve.

### Local Assessments

New Jersey's plan to develop a comprehensive assessment system builds on the success of districts in the design, implementation, and continuous improvement of interim and formative assessment systems.

- New Jersey's Race to the Top Plan will **offer challenge grants to LEAs to support the development, improvement, or scaling of assessment programs that align with state standards.**
- New Jersey will establish a transparent peer review process of LEA applications in concert with our Technical Advisory Committee.
- Locally developed assessments will need to be instructionally valid, closely linked to the curriculum, and measure higher order thinking skills. Instruction, not test prep, must be the heart of our system.

## Additional NJEA Specific Recommendations

### Evaluation System Metrics

To obtain more accurate measures of student progress, educators must use multiple methods of assessment including rubrics, portfolios, teacher-created assessments, teacher observation and student feedback.

- NJDOE strongly agrees with the use of multiple measures in the design of teacher and school leader evaluations. As part of Race to the Top, LEAs will be awarded state-funded grants for the developed of local measures of effective practice ranging from content-specific classroom observation protocols to a collection of teacher artifacts (including lesson plans and portfolios).
- NJDOE will also fund local development of teacher-created assessments for non-tested grades and subjects.

### **Professional Learning Communities**

Proper use of the evaluations should lead to a greater use of professional learning communities.

- NJDOE strongly agrees. Providing both formal and formative information to teachers and leaders is designed to support the improvement of practice throughout the state. **New Jersey is a national leader in supporting PLCs and will build on this work to support teachers and school leaders in continuously improving classroom instruction.**

### **Teacher Leaders/Master Teachers**

By creating a Teacher Leader Program, New Jersey Public Schools can identify teachers willing to share their successful classroom practice and strategies with their colleagues and the school community.

- NJDOE strongly agrees and has incorporated this recommendation into the Race to the Top plan in two ways. First, New Jersey has proposed additional compensation for highly effective teachers willing to act as teacher leaders to provide instructional coaching, mentoring, and formative feedback to their peers. Second, New Jersey has proposed a Master Teacher Certification in which experienced teachers with exceptional content and pedagogy knowledge as well as demonstrated success in improving student outcomes will be eligible to apply to become Master Teachers.

### **Turning Around Low-Performing Schools**

Turning around low-performing schools must be a statewide priority.

- Strongly Agrees with NJEAs position that all stakeholders must make a concerted effort to provide persistently low-achieving schools with the tools they need to become successful. New Jersey has built upon the foundational School Innovation and Renewal Zones and Network Turnaround Officer (NTO) in our Round I application to strengthen community engagement, building school and LEA capacity, and disseminate promising practices.
- NJDOE is steadfast in its commitment to support low-performing schools that make progress in improving school climate and student outcomes. However, we must take action if schools do not improve within three years.
- NJDOE supports the development of an N.J. Talented Teacher Turnaround Corps to attract teachers to persistently low performing schools. Building on the Race to the Top bonus program for teachers willing to teach in schools with a high proportion of student at risk, we will seek to provide 21<sup>st</sup> century classrooms, improve overall working conditions, and ensure teachers who answer this call have the option to return to their former positions.

NJEA's additional recommendations included a school-wide grant program which has informed the redesign of the incentive program referenced above. We would like to thank NJEA for their informed recommendations on developing a Race to the Top application that improves teaching and learning for all schools in New Jersey.

## **Additional NJPSA Specific Recommendations**

### **Implementation of a Longitudinal Data System is a Prerequisite to Evaluation System Implementation**

- NJDOE strongly agrees that relevant, accurate and timely information is a linchpin of the reforms envisioned by Race to the Top. New Jersey will ensure that valid, reliable and longitudinal data systems are in place and accessible to school leaders and staff before evaluation systems are implemented.

**Criteria for Local Assessments**

- NJDOE strongly agrees with the NJPSA recommendation for explicit guidelines on the development of local assessments so that the assessment systems is based upon units of study and aligned with state standards and measured over at least two points in time.

**Achievement Academies**

- NJPSA raised several questions regarding the operation, funding, and lines of authority regarding achievement academics. NJDOE recognizes Achievement Academies represent a bold and innovative school design that is new to New Jersey. We look forward to partnering with highly effective teachers and school leaders to pilot Achievement Academies, refine, and evaluate this concept as part of Race to the Top.

NJPSA also provided several suggestions regarding the RTTT plan details document provided at the May 11 stakeholder meeting. We sincerely thank the organization for their work and have posted an updated document that incorporates their feedback.

These changes will also be made to the summary of SEA and LEA responsibilities, available on the Race to the Top website, <http://www.state.nj.us/education/arra/grants/rttt/round2/index.html>.

Thank you for your hard work and support of teaching and learning in New Jersey's public schools.