



**STATE OF VERMONT
Department of Education
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Vermont Chooses Not to Apply for Federal Education Grant

MONTPELIER – The State of Vermont will not be applying for the second round of the federal Race to the Top grant, the Vermont Department of Education announced today.

The highly competitive grant program, financed under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), requires states to agree to very specific strategies, such as linking teacher pay to student performance, investing in charter schools and implementing turnaround models that could require the removal of principals in a data-driven school-ranking process.

Only two states, Delaware and Tennessee, received funds in the first round of grants (totaling over \$600 million). Vermont did not apply in the first round.

“We do not make this decision lightly,” said Education Commissioner Armando Vilaseca. “Vermont continues to struggle with the financial impacts of the recession, and our school districts have carried a heavy share of that impact. We believe that by focusing on this grant we would have to alter the course we have set for education, with absolutely no guarantee that we would be successful. We don’t think that makes sense for our schools, our teachers or for Vermont students.”

“The strategies required in Race to the Top may be entirely appropriate for some states,” said Vilaseca. “But Vermont’s strengths and challenges require different strategies. Our approach to improvement involves the entire system, PreK through 12 and beyond, and a statewide system of support for all schools. The focus of Race to the Top is not aligned with our statewide approach, and it would require significant policy and legislative changes that are not consistent with the good work happening across the state.”

Because Race to the Top is based on a point system that favors states with extensive data gathering systems, established teacher pay-for-performance agreements, existing state legislation for charter schools and broad indications of support from school boards, superintendents and education associations, it is unlikely that Vermont would be seriously considered for these specific grant funds, Vilaseca said.

Vermont currently does not have a statewide evaluation system of teachers and principals nor is there an existing system of tying teacher compensation to student achievement. In addition, Vermont does not have any charter school legislation nor any charter schools currently operating. The Vermont Department of Education recently conducted an informal, non-binding survey asking its 280 school districts if they were “likely” or “not likely” to support the application. Based on the sample of returns, it did not appear there was widespread support for the initiative.

“We will continue to work with education leaders in moving Vermont’s public education system forward,” said Deputy Commissioner Rae Ann Knopf. “We plan to pursue several initiatives that are already underway in Vermont, such as national common core standards, the statewide system of school support, longitudinal data systems and alternate pathways to licensure. We look forward to continuing to work with our partners on advancing the tenets of the Transformation Policy Commission’s *Opportunities to Learn* and the department’s *Roots of Success* documents. This is a time of thoughtful and collaborative change in Vermont education, and it is important now - more than ever - that we focus on what is truly working for Vermont students.”

Ken Page, Executive Director of the Vermont Principals Association, released the following statement: “It is clear to us that the Commissioner of Education, and indeed the entire Vermont Education community, has weighed this decision carefully and well. The Vermont Principals' Association supports the decision not to pursue this one-size-fits-all approach to school improvement. We are proud that Vermont schools are considered some of the best in the nation. Our schools will improve, not by simply throwing money at the problem, not by blaming and shaming school leaders and their communities, but by a concerted and deliberate effort by school personnel to work together to systematically address areas of need. The 21st century demands that we have a curriculum that is wider than just math and reading: our students must be highly skilled, highly motivated and well-rounded in all curricular areas. The Race to the Top competition is a distraction from the real work that must be done by Vermont's fine teachers and leaders.”

Vermont education officials noted that other states are also considering passing on the opportunity of applying for these particular funds. The Kansas State Board of Education voted last week 9-0 not to apply for the funds.

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