

NEWS

Connecticut Department of Education

Dr. Mark K. McQuillan
Commissioner

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Contact: Tom Murphy, 860-713-6525

Statement by Commissioner Mark McQuillan regarding USDOE List of First Round Race to the Top Finalists

We are, of course, disappointed that Connecticut is not on the short list of finalists for first round funding of Race to the Top grants. We knew that the competition was intense and that most states would not secure funds in the first round. However, we benefitted from an inclusive planning process involving many groups and developed a very strong plan for Connecticut's Education system that moves us in the right direction.

We look forward to receiving comments from the U.S. Department of Education as to how we can strengthen our application and will resubmit for the second round of funding in June.

Under the Race to the Top Grant Program, every state was offered a choice: to compete for highly competitive, first-round funding in January, or wait for the second round in June, to allow for more time to complete the application. The advantage of applying early was that, if states were not successful their first time, they could resubmit with no penalty and receive feedback from reviewers on how to improve the application in June.

Connecticut chose to apply in the first round to double our chances of securing funds and, if successful, to bring badly needed dollars to our state's schools as early as September. We approached this application with the commitment that our process should be inclusive and that the plan would represent the appropriate next steps for Connecticut. In other words, we were careful to shape our plan to address the criteria of the application without giving up our sense of what is right for our system. As a result, 126 school districts and 80 agencies, businesses and foundations have signed on, pledging their support for these reforms.

Connecticut's state reform plan is filled with many new ideas for our schools: priorities we need to meet in science, math, engineering and technology, new systems to supervise teachers and principals, better use of student data, parent outreach, and efforts to turn around our lowest performing schools. The plan calls for major reforms in our secondary schools, revisions to laws for local charter schools, and significant investments in professional development for beginning and experienced teachers in the areas of technology, data management, and project-based learning. The plan takes dead aim at eliminating Connecticut's alarming achievement gaps between white and minority student populations.

The State Department of Education welcomes all comments and suggestions as to ways we can improve our application for this vital federal funding and become even more competitive in Phase II. I encourage everyone to visit the state's Recovery Web site, to read our application and review the exceptional ideas contained within, to offer suggestions to improve it over the weeks ahead. Readers should direct their comments to the SDE at RTTT@ct.gov.