



# Illinois State Board of Education

100 North First Street • Springfield, Illinois 62777-0001  
www.isbe.net

**Jesse H. Ruiz**  
Chairman

**Christopher A. Koch, Ed.D.**  
State Superintendent of Education

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## What is the Race to the Top?

The Race to the Top (RT3) is a competitive grant program under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 that is intended to drive education reform and student success. It is a \$4.35 billion pool of funds that states may apply for and will be awarded based on state commitment to improvements in four key areas:

- Enhancing standards and assessments
- Improving data collection and use
- Strengthening teacher and administrator effectiveness
- Turning around struggling schools

## How much money will Illinois receive?

If Illinois' application is successful we could receive between \$200 million and \$400 million or more.

## When will the U.S. Department of Education announce awards?

The U.S. Department of Education will announce the winning states in April.

## How much money will go to local schools?

At least half of any sum awarded to Illinois will go directly to participating local education agencies. While funds will be distributed according to Title I formulas, we don't yet know what the amounts will be until we apply. If Illinois is awarded a federal grant, we'd then determine the final total of participating districts and grant allocations.

## How can local districts participate?

The federal government's RT3 application calls for local district participation. In order for districts to participate in the RT3 they must enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the state, in which they would agree to implement RT3 goals and strategies.

## Why should local districts participate in RT3?

Half of any sum of money Illinois receives through RT3 will go directly to "Participating LEAs" that agree to implement RT3 goals and strategies. The federal government will give states extra points if the memoranda of understanding are also signed by the local board president and the leader of the local teacher's union.

## What is the timeline for districts to decide whether or not they will participate in a Memorandum of Understanding?

The State of Illinois' application for RT3 is due in Washington on Jan. 19. We are asking that districts submit their MOU's to the Illinois State Board of Education by Jan. 11. We are aware of the difficulties this creates for local districts in deciding whether or not to make this commitment with the short timeframe and the fact it is happening during the holiday season. A request was made to the U.S. Department of Education that these timelines be extended. However, the U.S. Department of Education is not willing to extend the time by which the applications from states are due. Thus, we have no choice but to press forward as best we can.

### **What is the timeline for obligating and spending RT3 funds?**

The U.S. Department of Education will obligate all funds to selected states by Sept. 30, 2010. States will have four years after the time they are awarded an RT3 grant to implement plans and spend the funds.

### **Will these funds be used to balance the budget like the State Fiscal Stabilization Funds?**

Unlike the State Fiscal Stabilization Funds, the Race to the Top funds can only be used for the specific grant activities for which they were awarded and cannot be used for General State Aid or other types of expenditures.

### **Will teacher and principal evaluations be tied to student growth?**

Yes, districts that choose to participate must by the beginning of the 2012-13 school year use evaluations for teachers and principals where student growth comprises at least 50% of the evaluation.

### **How does Illinois' participation in internationally benchmarked common standards play into the RT3?**

Illinois' leadership in developing an internationally benchmarked common core of standards certainly moves us in the right direction for success. By Aug. 2, 2010, Illinois will adopt revised Learning Standards as part of its role in the Common Core State Standards Initiative.

Illinois will also be joining a consortium of states participating in the Common Core State Standards Initiative to jointly develop and implement common, high-quality assessments aligned with the Common Core K-12 standards. The U.S. Department of Education has set aside \$350 million to develop new tests based on these common internationally benchmarked standards.

### **What happens if Illinois doesn't win a grant? Will the state push forward with these reform initiatives?**

Yes, we will continue to push for the reforms as outlined in our application. While the application is for a competitive grant, the something is a vision of education reform for our state that we should strive towards regardless of the federal grant competition.

Additionally, there are two rounds to apply. We expect that if we do not receive a grant, we will receive valuable feedback that we can use as we apply for the second application round in June.

