

**Maine Education Association
Race to the Top (RTTT) – Advisory # 1
April 19, 2010**

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1) What is Race to the Top (RTTT)?

The Race to the Top (RTTT) is one of the competitive grant programs funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, P.L. 111-5, as amended by P.L. 111-8, under which the federal government will award \$4.35 billion in funding over the course of the next year. The program includes \$4 billion for statewide reform grants and \$350 million to support states working together to improve the quality of their assessments. The Race to the Top state competition is designed to reward states that are leading the way in comprehensive, coherent, statewide education reform across four key areas:

- Adopting standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace;
- Building data systems that measure student growth and success, and inform teachers and principals how to improve instruction;
- Recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals, especially where they are needed most; and
- Turning around their lowest-performing schools.

Every state is eligible to apply for RTTT awards that will be made on a competitive basis by grading each state's application on a 500 point scale.

RTTT awards will be made in two rounds – April 2010 and September 2010. In the first round, there were two winners: Delaware and Tennessee. Delaware will receive approximately \$100 million and Tennessee \$500 million to implement their comprehensive school reform plans over the next four years.

The U.S. Department of Education will have about \$3.4 billion available for the second phase of the RTTT competition. Applications for Phase 2 of Race to the Top are due on June 1, 2010. The Department is making one change to the rules for the Phase 2 competition. To fund as many strong applications as possible, the Department of Education is requiring states' applications to be within the ranges that were suggested in the original notice with Maine being in Category 5: \$20--\$75 million.

Information on Maine's RTTT application and related materials can be accessed at the [Maine DoE website](#).

2) Does our state affiliate, the Maine Education Association (MEA), have "signoff" authority on Maine's application to RTTT?

No. Only government officials (governor, DoE commissioner, head of the state board of education, attorney general) must sign off on the RTTT application.

3) Do local associations/affiliates of the MEA have “signoff” authority over local (LEA—Local Education Authority) participation in RTTT?

Yes, to an extent. Local association presidents are one of three individuals (along with superintendents and school board presidents) whose signature may be included in the “MOU” (Memorandum of Understanding) that LEAs must submit in order to be considered a “participating LEA.” While the LEA may agree to participate without including the local union signature, the absence of local union signatures must be noted on the state application to RTTT and the absence of signatures will mean fewer points for the state application. The total number and percentage of LEAs (as well as the demographics of the LEA) that “participate” in the state’s plan and application will be evaluated and scored.

4) Should local association presidents sign the MOU on RTTT?

Not at this time. The MEA’s Board of Directors urged local association presidents on April 7, 2010, “not to sign the MOU” until the state’s application is complete and we have had an opportunity to review it. There are still many unanswered questions about Maine’s MOU and RTTT application. Maine’s RTTT application is expected to be completed by the end of April, and probably sooner.

5) The Maine DoE is sponsoring “Focused RTTT Conversations” in April that were announced in DoE letters that were recently sent to school superintendents. What are those meetings, when are they scheduled, and should local association presidents (or designees) attend?

Maine DoE Commissioner Gendron has invited “. . . all school superintendents along with at least one school board member and one union representative from each School Administrative Unit (SAU), to participate in conversations on Maine’s RTTT application . . .”

These hour to hour-and-a-half conversations will take place in meetings and video conferences from April 14 through April 27 at numerous locations. Commissioner Gendron plans to discuss Maine’s MOU and RTTT state application at these meetings. The exact locations, dates, times, etc., and registration information can be found at this [link](#) established by the DoE.

If asked to participate in these meetings by school superintendents, MEA encourages local association presidents (or designees) to attend these sessions as these meetings are intended to be informational sessions only -- to learn more about the RTTT MOU and state application process.

6) Can LEAs sign on to the MOU after Maine has: a) submitted its application, or b) been awarded a RTTT grant?

Yes. LEAs may sign on at any point up to 90 days after the state has been awarded a RTTT grant.

[Note: Item # 6 above was written and published in accordance with NEA advisories on this topic. Since the 4/19/10 publication and circulation of this document, Maine DoE Commissioner Sue Gendron has clarified that the decision to add LEAs after the submission of the grant is a State

decision and not one that is required. She has affirmed that the Maine DoE position is that any district that did not sign up prior to submission would not be eligible for funding.]

7) Does an LEA have to participate in the state’s RTTT plan? If so, how much?

No. The LEA may choose not to participate, or it may decide to participate in certain parts of the state’s reform agenda. However, the extent to which LEAs participate in the state’s plan will be evaluated in the application. Also, LEAs may choose to be “involved” (i.e. not participate by signing an MOU) but instead agree at a later time to comply with some or all statewide reform efforts. “Involved” LEAs would not receive their share of the RTTT money as a “participating LEA” would, but they may receive some money to implement the reform efforts they become associated with and adopt.

8) Is the MOU designed to supersede existing contracts or collective bargaining agreements in our local affiliates?

No. Maine’s MOU contains the following language under Section II Project Administration, C. 4. Joint Responsibilities: “Nothing in this MOU shall be construed to alter or otherwise affect the rights, remedies, and procedures, afforded under federal, state, local laws (including applicable regulations or court orders) or under the terms of collective bargaining agreements.”

9) Many states engaged in enacting “fast-track” legislation over the past year to enhance their chances of success in the RTTT competitive award process. What changes did Maine make in existing statute as part of the RTTT application process?

Maine law was changed in three (3) important areas:

- 1) Innovative Schools -- School Administrative Units (SAUs) may now establish and operate an “innovative, autonomous public school.” For that school, the school board may approve an instruction design, a school calendar, a staff selection process and a method for assessing professional development that exceed or differ from, but do not conflict with, applicable statutory and regulatory requirements and the school board may request waivers as necessary to implement an instructional model and associated curriculum that meet the standards of this section for innovation and autonomy. The innovative, autonomous public school must demonstrate a system for accountability for student achievement that exceeds, but is not in conflict with, the State’s accountability standards and the State’s assessment system. And, any resident student in the SAU is eligible to request enrollment in an innovative, autonomous public school. A complete copy of the provision around “Innovative Schools” (originally LD 1801) that was signed into law on April 7, 2010, can be found [online](#).
- 2) Common Core of Standards -- The DoE, in consultation with the state board, will establish and implement a comprehensive, statewide system of learning results which may include a core of standards in English language arts and mathematics for kindergarten to grade 12 established in common with the other states. The department must establish accountability standards at all grade levels in the areas of mathematics; reading; and science and technology. The DoE will establish parameters for essential instruction and graduation requirements in English language arts; mathematics; science and technology; social studies;

career and education development; visual and performing arts; health, physical education and wellness; and world languages. A complete copy of the provision on the “Common Core of Standards (originally LD 1800) that was signed into law on April 12, 2010, can be found [online](#).

- 3) Use of Models in the Collection and Use of Student Achievement Data --The DoE will establish models for evaluation of the professional performance of teachers and principals employed in a SAU and the models must include multiple measures. Each SAU may select and incorporate one or more of the models developed for the evaluation of the professional performance of a teacher or principal employed by that SAU. If a SAU wants to include student assessments as part of teacher evaluations, that SAU must use one of the models developed and then reviewed and approved by a Stakeholders Group (that includes MEA), and then, ultimately adopted by the DoE for actual use at the SAU level. A complete copy of the provision on the Use of Models (originally LD 1799) that was signed into law on April 12, 2010, can be found [online](#):

10) What is the process and timeline for the adoption of Models to be used in the collection of student achievement data?

On April 14, 2010, Governor Baldacci signed Executive Order #11, An Order to Convene Stakeholders to Begin Reviewing Evaluation Models that Meet Federal Race to the Top Criteria. In the order, he directs the Department to convene the stakeholders group defined in LD 1799 as quickly as possible and to work toward approval of at least one model for the evaluation of professional performance of teachers and principals that includes student achievement data. This group, by law, is comprised of a representative of the Maine School Boards Association, the Maine Principals' Association, the Maine Education Association, the Maine School Superintendents Association and the Maine Administrators of Services for Children with Disabilities.

The models developed by the DoE and approved by the stakeholders group will be available to SAUs that participate with a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) as part of Maine's Race to the Top application. While the MOUs must be signed in May, SAUs will have 90 days from the date the U.S. Department of Education approves Maine's application to choose an evaluation model from among the model(s) developed by the Department and approved by the stakeholders group. The Governor has asked for at least one model to be approved by May 14. Additional models may be developed and approved by the stakeholders group after May 14. According to the DoE, it is essential for Maine's RTTT application that we have at least one approved model available to SAUs before June 1, when Maine's application is due so that Attorney General Janet Mills can sign an assurance that Maine does not have barriers to linking student achievement data to teacher or principal evaluations.

11) What is the timeline for signatures for Maine's MOU that is part of Maine's RTTT application?

According to the Maine DoE: May 14, 2010, but that date may change.

Stay Tuned for More Information and Advisories on Race to the Top (RTTT) and Related Matters