



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION


THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY

MEMORANDUM

DATE: October 15, 2009

TO: Bridget Dooling
Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs
Office of Management and Budget

THROUGH: Stephanie Valentine
Regulatory Information Management Services
U.S. Department of Education

FROM: Thelma Meléndez de Santa Ana, Ph.D. 
Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education

SUBJECT: Emergency Clearance of Race to the Top Application

The U.S. Department of Education's (ED) Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE) has developed an application for a new program, the Race to the Top Fund. The Race to the Top Fund was established in the "American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009," which was signed into law by the President on February 17, 2009. The ARRA provides \$4.3 billion for the Race to the Top Fund (referred to in the statute as the State Incentive Grant Fund).

Race to the Top is a competitive grant program. The purpose of the program is to encourage and reward States that are creating the conditions for education innovation and reform; achieving significant improvement in student outcomes, including making substantial gains in student achievement, closing achievement gaps, improving high school graduation rates, and ensuring student preparation for success in college and careers; and implementing ambitious plans in four core education reform areas: (a) adopting internationally-benchmarked standards and assessments that prepare students for success in college and the workplace; (b) building data systems that measure student success and inform teachers and principals in how they can improve their practices; (c) increasing teacher effectiveness and achieving equity in teacher distribution; and (d) turning around our lowest-achieving schools.

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The Department of Education's mission is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access.

ED is asking for emergency clearance so governors may begin applying as soon as possible for the first phase of Race to the Top funding. Since this is an ARRA-related emergency collection and there is an immediate need to make applications available, ED is requesting that the comment period be waived. However, a 60-day comment period will be offered during a regular collection review. ED does not anticipate significant changes to the application for the second phase of Race to the Top applications.

The Department is requesting that the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) clear the application on an emergency basis. ARRA funds must be obligated by September 30, 2010. In addition, the Department plans to allow States two opportunities to apply for Race to the Top funds as described below. In order to allow for the Race to the Top grants to be awarded in two phases, and for States unsuccessful in Phase 1 to have appropriate time to reapply in Phase 2, the Department is committed to expediting the application for Race to the Top, necessitating emergency clearance of the application.

ED plans to award grants to applicants (State governors) on a competitive basis. The Department plans to make Race to the Top grants in two phases. States that are ready to apply may do so in Phase 1, which will open in November 2009. States that need more time — for example, to engage in planning with and secure commitments from superintendents, school boards, principals, teachers, union leaders, and community supporters, or others — may apply in Phase 2, which will open in late Spring of calendar year 2010. States that apply in Phase 1 but are not awarded grants may reapply for funding in Phase 2, together with States that are applying for the first time in Phase 2. Awards for Phase 1 of Race to the Top must be made by April 1 so that States that were unsuccessful in Phase 1 can receive feedback, revise and resubmit new applications prior to the Phase 2 application deadline of June 1, 2010. All Race to the Top funds must be obligated by September 30, 2010. Receiving OMB's approval on an emergency basis is essential to providing States with two opportunities to apply for these funds.

If we are able to obtain emergency approval from OMB, ED intends to make applications available on the date that we public the Notice of Final Priorities, Requirements, Definitions, and Selection Criteria, which should be on or about November 13, 2009, with a 60 day period to apply.

ED is requesting OMB approval by November 6, 2009.

Thank you for your prompt consideration of my request. If you have questions, please contact Jim Butler at (202) 260-9737 or james.butler@ed.gov.