



## Colorado's Race to the Top

### Answers to Frequently Asked Questions

*Last Updated: December 11, 2009*

1. *Why is Colorado applying for a Race to the Top award?*

Race to the Top presents a unique opportunity to do a number of things that ultimately benefit Colorado and its students, including:

- Improve academic outcomes and close gaps in achievement for Colorado students
- Accelerate implementation of existing reform efforts (such as the Colorado Achievement Plan for Kids, Accountability Alignment and more)
- Build state-level capacity to support, not simply monitor and enforce, education reform efforts
- Inform the reauthorization of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act
- Serve as a national model of comprehensive statewide reform

2. *What are Colorado's chances of success in the Race to the Top?*

A number of factors place Colorado in a highly competitive position for Race to the Top, including recent adoption of the Colorado Growth Model, Colorado Achievement Plan for Kids and the Accountability Alignment Act, as well as strong collaboration with education stakeholders and a history of innovation, as demonstrated by our early adoption of charter school legislation and more recently the Innovation Schools Act. Our ability to secure strong support from school districts statewide, as well as the ambition of our state plan will likely determine our success in this competition.

3. *How will Colorado's application be judged?*

There are 500 maximum points that may be accumulated. Applications that receive the most funds will win the Race to the Top. Colorado's ability to accumulate enough points to win will

reflect our states past accomplishments (125 points) – such as student achievement and past reform initiatives – and the strength of our plan for reform in the four key reform areas listed above, as well as in STEM education (15 points). We will also be judged on the active commitment and participation of our school districts (40 points).

4. *How much money will Colorado receive as a result of a Race to the Top award?*

The US Department of Education issued *nonbinding* budget guidelines that estimate \$60-\$175 million for Colorado, however they have stressed that *states should ask for what they need to execute their plan*. Colorado anticipates submitting a request of approximately \$400 million.

5. *How much money will each Participating District receive?*

Half of Colorado's award must be distributed to Participating districts in accordance with their relative share of 2009 Title I regular and ARRA funds. Note, however that these are NOT Title I funds. The actual amount of funds that a Participating District receives will depend upon which districts and how many districts in fact choose to participate.

For an estimate of what your district might receive contact Nina Lopez, Director of ARRA at CDE at [Lopez\\_N@cde.state.co.us](mailto:Lopez_N@cde.state.co.us) or 303-916-5434.

6. *When will a Participating district receive its share of the Race to the Top funds?*

Similar to other federal program funds, Race to the Top monies will be reimbursed to Participating districts on a reimbursement basis after the district obligates the use of those funds in a manner consistent with the Scope of Work.

7. *Must a Participating district provide matching local funds to support the Race to the Top plan?*

There is no requirement to use local funds to match the state's award. Of course a district may decide to use its local funds to bolster its efforts to implement the Race to the Top plan.

Colorado intends to set aside a portion of its award funds to supplement a district's distribution amount in those instances where it is insufficient to fully fund the cost of local implementation.

8. *Should a school district build the anticipated Race to the Top funds into its 2010-2011 budget?*

No. A district should plan its annual budget as if the funds will not be received. When received, they may result in potential changes to your district budget but because they are not intended to backfill budget cuts or otherwise be used to sustain existing programs; your budget should be based upon other funds.

9. *Can a school district "participate" if it does not receive any Title I funds?*

Yes, but it will not receive any funds from the 50% that must be distributed to school districts. Instead, the amount of the award to those school districts will be determined by agreement between the district and the State.

*10. How will reforms be sustained after the grant period ends?*

Some of the investments made with Race to the Top funds are one-time in nature, others will require the state and local districts to consider re-allocating existing funds, and others may likely require new revenue sources (either at the state or local level) to sustain. *Participating districts agree to consider how to sustain the programs after the grant period ends but are not obligating expenditures of local funds beyond the grant period to sustain these efforts.*

*11. How will the second half of Colorado's Race to the Top funds be spent?*

The funds will be used in a variety of ways: one-time infrastructure or capacity building investments, additional grants to Participating districts where their share of the 50% of an award is insufficient to implement the state plan, state level resources to administer the grant, and state level support to Participating districts.

*12. What is the district required to do with its share of Race to the Top funds?*

The funds must be used in accordance with the terms that the State and the district have agreed upon in each district's Scope of Work. The Scope of Work will specify exactly how the state's Race to the Top proposal will be implemented within each district. Each district's Scope of Work will be mutually agreed upon in between the date that the state plan is submitted (January 2010) and 90 days after the award is received (July 2010). Each Scope of Work will be the product of collaborative conversations and mutually agreed upon by the district and State.

*13. What if my district does not ultimately agree with the state on the Scope of Work to implement the state plan?*

We hope that the state plan is one that every Participating district strongly supports. However, we recognize that details matter and some district may not ultimately be able to agree with the state on a Scope of Work to implement the state's plan. In that event, may elect *not* to be a Participating district even though you submitted a completed Memorandum of Agreement prior to the submission of the state's proposal to the US Department of Education.

*14. Do I have to amend my local collective bargaining agreement prior to signing the Memorandum of Agreement?*

No. Implementation of the state plan may or may not require amendment to your district's local bargaining agreement. In the event that it does, a signature on the Memorandum of Agreement means simply that you commit to enter into negotiations, if necessary, in order to facilitate the implementation as appropriate.

15. *Can I use my district's portion of Race to the Top funds to backfill cuts in state program funding?*

No. In most cases, the state plan will seek to accelerate or improve implementation of state reforms and policy priorities already in place or planned. However, you may not use Race to the Top to simply replace local or state funding for existing programs.

16. *Can a school district participate in Colorado's Race to the Top plan even if it is not a Participating district?*

Yes. In general, the intent of the state's Race to the Top proposal is to enact statewide reform. Rather than require this, we are inviting only those districts that choose to participate to enact these reforms. Nonetheless, certain aspects of the state plan, such as improving data systems, are statewide in nature and districts that choose to implement are encouraged to do so. A portion of the Race to the Top funds may be available to support implementation efforts among those school districts ("Involved districts") that are not Participating districts.

17. *What is the deadline for signing the MOU?*

Participating districts are encouraged to submit the required items (discussed above) on or before December 23, 2009. Districts will not be able to elect to become Participating districts after that date, unless otherwise notified.

18. *Can I decide to participate after the state award is made?*

No. Unless you complete the process for becoming a Participating district on or before December 23, 2009 (see above), you will be unable to Participate. You may, however, still be considered an "Involved" district and participate in portions of the Race to the Top plan.

19. *May a school district decide to discontinue its participation during the course of the grant award?*

Yes, although they will be unable to receive a portion of the award funds.

20. *Can the state discontinue a district's participation during the course of the award period?*

Yes. If a district fails to implement the Scope of Work in the manner agreed to, the state may take several steps to intervene, including, ultimately, discontinuing distribution of funds to the district.

21. *What must my district do to become a Participating district?*

In order to become a Participating district, you must submit a Memorandum of Understanding, including Appendix A, signed by the Superintendent and President of your local school board. The signature on the MOU of the president of your local teachers union is *strongly encouraged*

but will not be required to Participate. In addition, Participating districts will be asked to submit certain baseline data to be included in the state proposal.

22. *Can a district be a Participating district and choose only those portions of the state plan that it wishes to implement?*

Yes. Certain portions of the state plan may be inapplicable in some districts and the means of implementation may vary within each district. However, each district will be required to participate in all aspects of the state plan. A district may not choose which portions it wishes to implement and those that it does not.

23. *Will districts be required to adopt identical means for implementing each aspect of the state plan?*

No. The state plan will require a certain degree of comparability and compliance with minimum standards. What that means will differ from district to district. For example, if your district already has an educator evaluation system that satisfies the race to the top plan, you need not adopt a new plan. Similarly, other Participating districts do not need to adopt the same plan but must adopt a plan that complies with the same set of minimum criteria. This is similar to the concept of model content standard in Colorado, which districts must “meet or exceed” but may implement in a manner that each local community determines is appropriate for its local needs.

24. *Whose signatures are required in order to be a Participating district?*

The signature of the local district Superintendent (or BOCES President, if applicable) as well as that of the school board President is required. The signature of a local bargaining unit’s President is highly desirable but not required.

25. *Is the signature of a union representative desirable even if there is no collective bargaining agreement in place in a district?*

Yes

26. *Can a BOCES be a Participating district?*

Yes, if the BOCES has been designated as a “local education agency” for purposes of any federal funding program (e.g. Title I); provided, however, that (i) a majority of the member districts in the BOCES participate in the implementation efforts and (ii) the BOCES has an ability to fully implement the plan among those member districts.

27. *Will charter schools be able to participate in the Race to the Top?*

Yes, through their authorizer. Participating districts will be expected to provide equal access to their charter schools to participate in their local implementation efforts.

