



December 29, 2009

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Dear Superintendent:

As you know, Commissioner Steiner has asked the State's school districts to offer visible support for the State's application for a sizeable federal Race to the Top (RTTT) grant. While not every aspect of the plan has been finalized, the broad outlines have taken shape along with many of the elements. We see much in this plan that is consistent with THE COUNCIL's longstanding policy agenda including:

- Updating state learning standards, including prioritizing the development of higher order thinking skills, and components of 21<sup>st</sup> century literacy – proficiency in economics, technology and the arts;
- Improving state assessments, so that they measure what matters (not merely what is easy to measure), and produce information that teachers and schools can use to improve instruction;
- Facilitating the construction of a “P-20” data system, giving educators, families, researchers and policymakers more and better data and tying that data into feedback loops that can reinforce sound research and practice;
- Improving teaching and school leadership, and
- Muscular interventions in chronically dysfunctional schools and districts.

Realizing these reforms will require significant resources. The RTTT grant offers not only the best chance to obtain these resources, but will likely have a synergistic effect on the State's ability to raise funds from other significant funders. The strongest way for the state to show widespread support for the reform agenda is through the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) process, since it is specifically required by the federal grant application.

A successful grant application will have other benefits as well – 50 percent of any award under RTTT will go directly to school districts which sign an MOU through the Title I Part A formula. If the state received the maximum possible grant of \$700 million, and every district signed an MOU, your district could receive a grant roughly equivalent to 30 percent of its regular Title I Part A allocation for this year.<sup>1</sup> Districts which do not sign an MOU forego eligibility for a grant, increasing the funding available to districts which do elect to participate. While not all districts will receive significant amounts, every district has a stake in improving our system. Moreover, all districts will be able to compete for additional funding from the State's allocation.

NEW YORK STATE COUNCIL OF SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS

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Accordingly, we strongly encourage districts to work through an appropriate local process to sign the MOU and improve the State's chances. Although district policies may permit the superintendent to legally sign such documents as an "agent" of the district, both the State's application and the superintendent's representation of the district are strengthened by Board commitment, especially since the MOU addresses policy matters that will ultimately involve local elaboration. Similarly, consultation with the district's attorney is also advisable as one of the assurances concerns your scope of authority to sign the MOU.

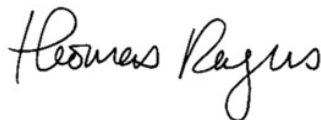
Boards may have some legitimate reservations about how strongly the MOU commits them to a policy agenda. According to a question and answer document<sup>2</sup> released by the State Education Department on Monday, the MOU only commits it negotiate a "Scope of Work" in "good faith", and then only if the State wins an RTTT grant.

Boards may also have reservations about items appearing in the Regents legislative agenda, particularly with respect to expansions of charter schools and the governance of chronically failing schools, just as local bargaining unit leaders may have misgivings about the Regents proposal to streamline the 3020(a) process. While these changes may improve the State RTTT application's prospects, signing the MOU does not necessarily bind the district to support these measures, only to work in good faith on the "4 Assurances".

In summary, we believe the Commissioner and Regents have advanced a reform agenda that strongly parallels THE COUNCIL's, has high fidelity to the research on school improvement, will build useful and lasting infrastructure and capacity, and which values educational leaders and seeks to expand their role. Securing the resources through RTTT necessary to advance this agenda will ensure its benefits are realized more quickly. The MOU is the process by which districts can express support for that agenda by signaling a willingness to discuss in good faith its local implementation.

Therefore, THE COUNCIL has advanced the attached letter of support to Commissioner Steiner for incorporation into the State's RTTT application and encourages district leaders to consider signing the MOU to do likewise.

Sincerely,



Dr. Thomas Rogers  
Executive Director

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<sup>1</sup> Title I Part A allocations are available here: <http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/nclb/allocations/0910/titleiallocpre>. To get a rough estimate of your district's potential allocation, take 30 percent of the figure in the column headed "PART A" – do not include Part A funds from ARRA.

<sup>2</sup> <http://usny.nysed.gov/rttt/FAQFinal1228.pdf>