

Race to the Top – A defining moment for Florida’s schools

On January 19, 2010, Florida will take a historic step toward helping our country reclaim a worldwide leadership role in the academic preparation and performance of our students. A decade of educational reforms has brought Florida to the forefront of change and innovation, and because of our action, we’re now in a position to compete nationally for an unprecedented level of funding through the federal Race to the Top competition. This competition is designed to improve every facet of our education system, and it challenges every member of that system to unite to tackle the hurdles in our classrooms and schools. Florida’s future depends on our ability to implement bold new initiatives and it will take every Floridian to carry out this vision to ensure the success of our students.

So, what does Race to the Top mean to you?

To teachers, Race to the Top means increased access to professional development opportunities to open up new pathways to achieving success with your students. You can also expect an equitable evaluation and compensation system that will reward you for your ability to positively shape the lives of the future leaders of this country. And most importantly, we recognize that teaching, just like any other profession, flourishes when you have more time for collaborative planning, and that’s why Florida’s proposal concentrates on making that a reality for you.

Parents, we know your goal is to ensure your children receive the support they need to be successful in their future. For you, Race to the Top means a greater focus on the individual academic needs of your children and a varied curriculum that will prepare them for success in today’s competitive job market no matter their area of interest. It also means equality in our schools where each child is ensured a high quality learning environment regardless of which school they attend.

To business leaders, Race to the Top is vital to the creation of a talent pipeline that can support and transform Florida’s economy. Through our proposal, postsecondary education will be considered the norm whether it’s college or career preparation, and our job candidates will be highly sought after, qualified, critical thinkers who will be ready to hit the ground running and immediately contribute to the success of your business. Our application is focused on creating optimum opportunity and economic prosperity for all Floridians, and sets the stage for an education system capable of producing the workforce of the future.

As students, you are the reason we’ve entered this race. Though the benefits of this competition are exciting for our entire education system, we will not forget this opportunity was created for you. Through Race to the Top, our goal is to provide you with more educational opportunities than ever before. We aim to surround you with expert teachers, dedicated and trained to help you reach your fullest potential. Our focus is to position you ahead of the learning curve, preparing you for postsecondary education so that you can and will meet your career goals. The future of Florida lies in your hands and through Race to the Top we will work to ensure no opportunity is beyond your reach.

Race to the Top is truly a once in a lifetime opportunity to dramatically improve our learning environments and provide all members of our education system the tools they need to reach the top of their game. Like any physical or mental challenge, this race will require hard work, training and adaptability, but ultimately I am confident we are prepared to win.

Our schools need this, our economy needs this, and you need this – no matter who you are. Support Florida’s application to redefine the education of our youth and help guarantee the prosperity of our children for generations to come.

Dr. Eric J. Smith
Florida Commissioner of Education