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## **Bringing Education Reform To Maryland**

### *How Maryland Can Complete For Federal Incentives*

#### **Executive Summary**

In order to compete successfully for large new federal grants, Maryland will have to raise academic standards, track individual student progress, recruit stronger staff for disadvantaged students and intervene more effectively in low-performing schools. The Governor's leadership will help overcome resistance to these reforms.

#### **Background**

The federal stimulus package contains large competitive grants for states to reform their public schools, including:

- \$4.35 billion in "race to the top" funds;
- \$650 million in "innovation" funds;
- \$200 million for teacher incentives;
- \$100 million for teacher quality enhancements;
- \$250 million for statewide data systems.

The U.S. Department of Education has said that all competitive grants will focus on four reforms: high academic standards; tracking student progress; equitable distribution of qualified teachers; and effective interventions in low-performing schools. Grant guidelines will be issued soon; the race to the top funds will be available in two rounds, one in fall 2009, and the second in the spring 2010.

Governor Martin O'Malley said that Maryland will compete aggressively for these grants, and has charged the Maryland State Board of Education to do so. The grants will require Maryland to make major changes, long resisted by the State's education establishment.

#### **Discussion**

##### *High Academic Standards*

The federal grants will require "rigorous college- and career-ready standards and high-quality assessments that are valid and reliable for all students."

Since the passage of No Child Left Behind, Maryland has repeatedly lowered its standards.

The passing level on state tests is among the lowest in the country, and last year the State deleted some of the more difficult items. The State has created numerous loopholes in its requirement that students pass high school tests, which only measure skills between eighth and tenth grade. The State also eliminated numerous subjects previously tested, including writing and social studies. Science is tested in some grades but does not count for school accountability purposes.

##### *Tracking Individual Student Progress*

The federal grants will require "pre-K-to college and career data systems that track progress and foster continuous improvement." This system can be used to measure the impact or "added value" of individual teachers and to develop interventions based on the needs of each student.

For more than a decade, Maryland has said that it was developing an added-value system, but it still lacks the ability to do even the most rudimentary tracking of student progress.

##### *Staffing Incentives*

The federal grants will require "improvements in teacher effectiveness and in the equitable distribution of qualified teachers for all students, particularly students who are most in need." Maryland has one of the nation's largest teacher quality gaps between low- and high-poverty schools.

##### *Interventions in Low-Performing Schools*

The federal grants will require "intensive support and effective interventions for the lowest-performing schools." Despite numerous attempts, Maryland still lacks an effective system for turning around low-performing schools. Weak, unstable leadership is a major, unaddressed factor.

#### **Conclusion**

It is fortunate the Governor and his State Board of Education plan to compete for these federal grants and to make needed reforms.

