

Garden Grove Unified School District

“Race to the Top” Frequently Asked Questions

What is Race to the Top?

Race to the Top (RTTT) is a \$4.35 billion competitive grant program through the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) as part of the federal economic stimulus program known as the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA).

What are the goals of Race to the Top?

The purpose of the grant is to encourage states and school districts to implement educational reforms in four key areas:

- Enhancing standards and assessments
- Creating and using data to improve instruction
- Increasing effectiveness of teachers and school leaders
- Turning around low-performing schools

How do states participate in Race to the Top?

States were to apply to the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) for Race to the Top funds by January 19. Governor Schwarzenegger and other required officials signed California's Race to the Top application on January 15. The first round of grants will be approved in April 2010. If a state's initial application is not approved, it can reapply for the second wave of grants, which will be awarded in the 2010-11 school year.

How large a grant can California expect?

If selected, the state is eligible for between \$350-700 million. The state would retain 50 percent for its use and 50 percent of the state's award will be divided among participating local school agencies such as districts, charter schools, and county offices of education.

If the GGUSD were to participate, how much would it receive?

Because the state does not know the total size of its grant, it will not commit to any funding amount for local school districts. However, if the funds are allocated using the current Title I program funding formula, and if the state were awarded the full \$700 million, GGUSD's share could be approximately \$3 million to be spent over four years.

How do local school districts commit to participate in Race to the Top?

For school districts to participate, districts were to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that was due to the state Department of Education by January 8. If or when California's application is approved, participating schools districts will have 90 days to submit a final scope of work and budget detailing their plans.

Did the GGUSD sign and submit the MOU?

At its regular meeting of January 5, the Board of Education unanimously directed the Superintendent to refrain from signing the MOU. In fact, only nine of Orange County's 28 school districts, and 457 of 1,042 statewide, authorized the agreements.

Several key reasons for the Board's decision were:

- The GGUSD is asked to approve the MOU in good faith without a full understanding of the state's Race to the Top plan of how it will be implemented or the impact it will have on students. The state's plan was not completed prior to the action by the Board of Education.
- The MOU commits the district to a number of requirements in return for an unspecified amount of one-time federal funds to be spent over a four-year period.
- The ability to execute some of the requirement elements is dependent on agreement with the local teachers' association.
- The reporting requirements, which may be considerable, and allowable uses of the funding, are unspecified.
- There are no specific criteria for identifying low-achieving schools.
- If the state's application is approved, participating districts must implement ALL required components of the state's RTTT application.
- There is valid concern about the sustainability of programs supported by Race to the Top – the so-called “funding cliff.” This is one-time only money to be expended for up to four years. Participants could be left with an unwanted financial burden to maintain RTTP programs without additional resources to pay for them when the funding period lapses. Race to the Top could be another unfunded or underfunded mandate requiring a local subsidy using district general fund money as in Special Education and Class Size Reduction programs.

Doesn't the GGUSD support educational reform?

The district supports accountability and believes the effort and objectives of Race to the Top are commendable. The GGUSD has implemented many initiatives compatible with Race to the Top such as instituting a comprehensive data system to drive the delivery of instruction and support individual student achievement, robust staff development programs, benchmark testing, after-school programs, instruction and assessments based on rigorous state standards, and all schools – regardless of performance – maintain and carry out comprehensive improvement plans.

Can the district pursue Race for the Top Funding in the future?

The district will have additional opportunities in the future. The timelines are undetermined at this time.