



Aug. 28, 2009

Race to the Top Fund Comments
c/o Office of Elementary and Secondary Education
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Ave. SW, Room 3W329
Washington, DC 20202

via eRulemaking Portal:
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The American School Counselor Association applauds President Obama's inclusion of educational programs into the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 and commends the Department of Education's efforts to use funds to effect real and meaningful school reform. We believe the funds allocated for the Race to the Top Fund represents a tremendous investment in the education of our youth that can have an impact for generations to come.

ASCA whole-heartedly supports the five proposed priorities, however, we would like to express some concerns and to request reconsideration of some specific provisions.

First and foremost, we request that the Race to the Top Fund expands the definition of teacher to include professional staff such as media and information specialist, instructional coaches, school counselors, school psychologists, school social workers and others who may not be involved in actual classroom instruction but nonetheless are crucial to student academic success. Many of these professionals have advanced educational degrees and provide instruction in non-classroom settings. School counselors in particular are actively involved in all four of the education reform areas of ARRA, however, limited resources and inordinate pupil to school counselor ratios often hamper school counselors' ability to perform the tasks they need in order to serve their students most effectively.

Like other organizations, ASCA believes standards and assessments of student performance are crucial to overall student success, however, assessments should be based on multiple measures and not just one measure or type of measure. The Race for the Top selection criteria stipulates the use of multiple rating categories to evaluate the effectiveness of teachers and principals; students also deserve to be evaluated using multiple measures.

ASCA strongly supports STEM education and has participated in many programs to promote STEM education, particularly among females and other under-represented populations. We join with the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, United Voices for Education and others in promoting the development of the total child through social and emotional learning as well as the core academic subjects. We believe personal and social development should be a standard part of the curriculum not only because it provides students with the qualities they need to become responsible adults, but it also leads to improved academic achievement.

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Finally, we believe true reform comes from innovations that already have been proven to be effective. This is the driving philosophy behind charter schools, to use charter schools as “experimental laboratories” for educational innovations and then to incorporate the most effective practices into mainstream schools. Therefore, we request that Priority 5 be upgraded from an invitational priority to a competitive priority. All public schools that have moved beyond the practices of the past century, have integrated new administrative and instructional practices, and have demonstrated positive results should be highlighted, and their practices should be held up as exemplary for other districts.

Contrary to many critics of the American educational system, ASCA does not believe the system is fundamentally broken. We agree, however, that it is in need of reform. Many of the standard practices and underlying philosophies have been in place for more than 100 years and are no longer valid or effective for today’s students. We are confident that the policies of President Obama and Secretary Duncan can effect true change that will benefit our students. Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments about the Race to the Top Fund.

