



### **Race to the Top Coalition: Investing in Our State's Children**

President Obama's \$4.35 billion "Race to the Top" competition is too important for Massachusetts to ignore. As the birthplace of public education and the foremost state on education reform, there is no other place for our state than at the forefront of this effort. With the State Senate's passing of the Education Reform Act of 2009 on November 17, 2009, it is now up to the House of Representatives to enact this legislation when it reconvenes in January and enhance the Commonwealth's chances for its share of this money. Applications for Race to the Top funds are due by mid-January.

The call from the President is clear: only those states that embark on a path of meaningful reforms can compete for their share of the \$4.35 billion in Race to the Top education dollars. His guidelines call for some bold decisions by educators and policymakers, but when it comes to our children's future, Massachusetts has never shied from its commitment to public education. At a time when budget dollars are so limited, why would our state not make its best case for these funds? At a time when so many children are falling behind and left unprepared for the workforce, why would we be satisfied with the status quo? We must implement change now and do the right thing for our children.

To see these reforms through, The Boston Foundation has convened an unprecedented and diverse coalition of support. Together, the Race to the Top Coalition will work to ensure that our state's students are provided every opportunity to learn. Our objective could not be more important and the timing could not be more critical. The work will get done. Led by the President's call to action, along with the local efforts of Governor Patrick, Mayor Menino and the legislature, and supported locally by our coalition of parents, businesspeople, policymakers, educators, and community leader, we will see these reforms through.

The choice before Massachusetts is quite simple: we can compete for hundreds of millions in federal money or we can reject the President's call for reform, cause our children to lose out and forgo our preeminence on education reform.

## Message Points

- The Race to the Top Coalition has enthusiastically endorsed the education reform effort underway in the Massachusetts Legislature and is pleased that the Senate passed the Education Reform Act of 2009 on November 17, 2009. The Race to the Top Coalition urges the Massachusetts House of Representatives to follow their Senate colleagues and enact this important bill.
- In the Race to the Top guidelines published by the U.S. Department of Education, Massachusetts could see as much as \$250 million from this competitive grant if it undertakes substantial enough reforms. The Education Reform Act of 2009 included many of the key reforms necessary for Massachusetts to be eligible to compete for federal Race to the Top stimulus funds.
- The Massachusetts House of Representatives must also pass the legislation in a timely fashion so that the state can submit its application to the U.S. Department of Education before the January 19 deadline. The Legislature will not convene again until early January 2010, which does not give us much time between passing the reform legislation and submitting a complete, competitive application. State legislatures around the country are similarly taking bold steps to boost their respective chances so it is imperative that we act quickly and decisively.
- We are the nation's most innovative, forward-thinking state on education, but we must maintain our edge. This is an unprecedented opportunity for Massachusetts. The prospect of hundreds of millions of dollars from President Obama's \$4.35 billion Race to the Top stimulus money demands that we act now to meet the December application deadline to apply for these funds. Massachusetts needs to undertake significant, additional reforms to help turn around underperforming schools to strengthen our ability to compete for Race to the Top.
- It is this imperative that brought together our wide-ranging statewide coalition of stakeholders, through the convening of The Boston Foundation, to insist that reforms be enacted now. We are urban and suburban, parents and businesspeople. Together with the Governor and Mayor of Boston, we share a concern over the state of our schools and are committed to seeing reform through.
- We recognize that Massachusetts needs a portfolio of schools: there isn't a "one size fits all" model that works best. But we also know that different school structures empower teachers and help them to make decisions about what works best for students.
- Race to the Top funds will offer support to both traditional and non-traditional public schools throughout the Commonwealth. These funds will allow Massachusetts to enact meaningful educational reforms that increase the options for parents and students, teachers and educators, and cities and towns.

- This is about getting the job done for our schools and students. Why would we want to jeopardize the chance to get our share of \$4.35 billion in federal dollars to improve our underfunded and underperforming schools, especially during difficult budget times?

#### Why we need reform

- Clearly, the status quo is not working and more of the same is not the answer. For so long we've talked about education reform, the challenges and disparities among schools, the persistent achievement gap, and the need for a more educated workforce. Students today compete with the students of the world. On that front we are failing them. We must act now to strengthen and improve our schools.
- The most pressing issue with public education locally – and nationally – is that there isn't enough broad, sustainable improvement in student achievement, in part because effective changes are not allowed to be incorporated in the current educational model.
- The charge before us is straightforward. Many states will compete for the federal money and not all will qualify. We are closer than most, but our actions must involve reforms that adopt tough academic standards, address teacher performance, disperse quality teachers to low-performing schools, and broaden opportunities to parents for quality school choices.
- There is noteworthy momentum from all sectors and from all levels of government. President Obama has challenged states to foster innovation and to expand access to successful charter schools. Governor Patrick has called for a doubling of the charter cap in the state's lowest performing districts and the creation of related Readiness Schools. Mayor Menino has called for in-district charter schools. Their specific proposals may differ in detail, but how each proposes to reform our educational system is less important than their collective desire to create a system that will best serve our kids.

#### Why we must consider alternative solutions for our education future

- Every child from every background deserves access to a quality education, with quality teachers and principals. This is the civil rights issue of our time which needs bold leadership from our public officials. The achievement gap separates kids not just in terms of test scores, but in terms of their futures.
- Every district deserves the opportunity to innovate and meet the needs of its students. Every parent of a child in a low performing school deserves the option of sending their children to a better school. The legislation offered by Governor Patrick and Mayor Menino applies our strongest reform to the neediest students.

- In Massachusetts and across the country, the more parents have access and information about innovation in public schools, the more demand for these services increases.
- We must act now to promote a consistent commitment to innovation and excellence in all of our schools– our children cannot afford to wait.