ABSTRACT

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) provides more than $100 billion for education to save jobs and support innovation. The large majority of the resources are non-competitive, flow through established formulae, and have (or will have) detailed guidance on their uses. However, the ARRA also gives Secretary Duncan broad discretion over the distribution of $5.5 billion in competitive grants that he will deliver through several different funds. The competitive grants are designed to drive bold education reforms.

This issue paper outlines the emerging Obama reform agenda, summarizes the key grants, and offers a number of reform concepts that could be adopted by the state or individual districts. The paper concludes with ideas on how Chalkboard could partner with school districts and other education stakeholders.

VISION OF EDUCATION REFORM IN THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION

The Obama Administration placed education among its top priorities and has conveyed strong signals about its vision of education reform through a number of speeches, interviews and issue papers. The following has emerged:

- **Strengthening educator quality is the most cost effective way to improve achievement.** The Administration has signaled a top-to-bottom review of all systems that select, support, and retain teachers and principals. The Department is looking for more rigorous evaluations of teachers and the schools that train them, tighter and more supportive induction processes, and innovative ways to compensate educators.

- **Data drive reforms.** Administration officials believe districts sit atop a mountain of data that speak to the effectiveness of their schools and that they have made too little use of it to date. Making better use of data—to evaluate schools and individual educators—is the foundation to any substantive reform.

- **Old debates aren’t welcome.** President Obama and Secretary Duncan have moved away from topics that have dominated the education debates of the
The Origins of the Vision

A number of think tanks and academics have shaped the Administration’s vision on education reform. Among the most influential are:

The Center for American Progress. The progressive think tank, headed by John Podesta, has advocated extended learning time and making better use of existing hours. See http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2009/04/education_recovery.html

The Brookings Institution’s Hamilton Project. Founded by former Clinton Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin, the Hamilton Project has advanced broad policy guidance on teacher evaluation and early-age interventions. See http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2006/04education_gordon.aspx

last several decades. Across-the-board class size reductions and vouchers aren’t central to their reform agenda.

• Doing more with the same resources is expected. It’s unclear where the President stands on the K-12 adequacy debate, but the Administration expects districts and schools to make better use of the time and resources they have. Innovative demonstrations around scheduling and class configurations are anticipated.

NON-COMPETITIVE FUNDS

Nationally, the ARRA targeted more than $100 billion to PreK-20 education. The large majority of the funds is non-competitive and will be distributed to states and local school districts through established formulae. Oregon districts will receive the bulk of their funding, directly or indirectly, from the ARRA Fiscal Stabilization Fund, Title I, and IDEA allocations. The Fiscal Stabilization Fund’s education block grant could ultimately provide $466 million in flexible PreK-20 resources to Oregon. Oregon’s Title I and IDEA allocations are estimated at $130.6 and $134.5 million, respectively.

In order to receive these non-competitive funds, states had to assure they were making progress in four areas:

• College and work ready standards; high quality, valid and reliable assessments
• PreK-20 data systems
• Teacher effectiveness and the equitable distribution of effective teachers
• Intensive support and effective interventions for the lowest-performing schools

The US Department of Education (USDOE) accepted Oregon’s application in late April. On April 24th, the USDOE issued suggestions on best uses of the non-competitive stabilization, Title I, and IDEA funds (see Box). In all, the Department listed more than two dozen specific project concepts ranging from improved teacher induction and mentoring programs to dropout prevention programs targeted to 9th graders.

The USDOE has made clear that the success of any local applications for competitive funds will hinge on the use of these non-competitive funds. So, even though the majority of these resources will simply replace state dollars lost to the economic downturn, districts and the state need to demonstrate a change in course if they seek competitive funds. Specifically, they will need to show more intensive use of student data, more rigorous teacher evaluations and supports, and a more effective approaches to turning around chronically low-performing schools.

USDOE suggested policymakers ask five questions when considering the use of ARRA funds. Does the spending...

1. Drive results for students?
2. Increase capacity?
3. Accelerate reform?
4. Avoid the cliff and improve productivity?
5. Foster continuous improvement?

See www.ed.gov/policy/gen/leg/recovery/guidance/uses.doc
THE COMPETITIVE FUNDS

ARRA will offer $5.55 billion in competitive funding through five funds:

- **Race to the Top ($4.35 billion)** awarded by Secretary Duncan to states that make significant progress in four areas: 1) maintaining K-12 funding at 2006 levels; 2) achieving equity in teacher distribution; 3) improving data collection and use; 4) improving standards and assessments. States must indicate how funding would be prioritized for high-need schools and how the state will evaluate if progress is made in closing the achievement gap. The Administration has signaled that funding will go to a select group of states, perhaps as a few as a dozen, that can demonstrate aggressive and effective educational improvement. Ten percent of the resources will go to a handful of top-tier states in Fall 2009. A draft proposal is due in June, and a final proposal must be submitted in October. The remaining 90 percent of funding will be released in a second phased schedule for Spring 2010.

- **Invest in What Works and Innovation Fund ($650 million)** reserved for the Secretary to recognize local education agencies. Duncan and his team want to focus on efforts that can be “researched and scaled up.” As the title suggests, the fund will reward both proven and emerging approaches. Interested applicants should be familiar with the “What Works Clearinghouse” and its sister site “Doing What Works.” The former site describes specific interventions, proven through rigorous research, to drive achievement and attainment. The latter addresses how to implement proven practices. The recipients will be local school districts, partnerships between a nonprofit organization and one or more school districts, or a nonprofit and a consortium of schools. The awards will be given to districts or other eligible entities that have made gains in closing the achievement gap, according to the law. School districts must also have met annual state performance measures for at least two years in a row, have demonstrated academic achievement improvement for all groups of students, and have made progress in other areas, such as graduation rates and high-quality teachers. The districts must also demonstrate that they can get matching funds through partnerships with the private sector.

- **State Data Systems Grants ($250 million)** to strengthen states’ longitudinal data systems. Prior to ARRA, the federal government had already awarded data grants to 27 states, including Oregon. The Administration considers longitudinal data as critical to developing growth models in assessing student achievement. Oregon’s longitudinal database, known as KIDS, will provide the Oregon Department of Education, school districts and the Oregon University System with a single, accurate, and authoritative student data system for the entire state, allowing seamless storage, access, and data transfer between districts and the state. The project is on track for full implementation in winter of 2010. ODE is considering an application to the federal government to enhance KIDS through a stimulus grant.

- **Teacher Incentive Fund ($200 million)** to implement innovative principal and teacher compensation models to support recruitment and retention efforts in high-need schools and subjects. This program supports efforts to develop and implement performance-based teacher and principal compensation systems in high-need schools. Goals include: 1) improving student achievement by increasing teacher and

Data systems to me are at the heart of this reform effort...we need comprehensive data systems that do three things. One, track students throughout their educational trajectory. Secondly, track students back to teachers so we can really shine a spotlight on those teachers that are doing a phenomenal job of driving student achievement. And third, track teachers back to their schools of education.

Secretary Duncan, *EdWeek* Interview, March 2009


principal effectiveness; 2) reforming teacher and principal compensation systems so that teachers and principals are rewarded for increases in student achievement; 3) increasing the number of effective teachers teaching poor, minority, and disadvantaged students in hard-to-staff subjects; and 4) creating sustainable performance-based compensation systems. Projects develop and implement performance-based teacher and principal compensation systems in high-need schools.

Performance-based compensation systems must consider gains in student academic achievement as well as classroom evaluations conducted multiple times during each school year among other factors and provide educators with incentives to take on additional responsibilities and leadership roles. School districts, states, or partnerships may apply, and at least one nonprofit organization may apply.

- **Teacher Quality Funds ($100 million)** are additional resources to support further grants enhancing teacher quality and readiness. The stimulus appropriation expands an existing state grant program designed to increase the number of highly qualified teachers in classrooms, increase the number of highly qualified principals in schools, and hold school districts accountable for teacher and principal effectiveness.

## OPPORTUNITIES

Opportunities to demonstrate bold, aggressive, and effective reform are multiple. Successful applications will be data-driven strategies targeted to strengthening educator quality and shrinking the achievement and attainment gaps. Below are a number of concepts that would appear to be in alignment with the Administration’s reform agenda.

- **Finish the work on the longitudinal database.** Oregon has made good progress on developing its PreK-20 longitudinal database, which will allow researchers to track students over time and across systems. Two major shortcomings exist. First, the system fails to link K-12 students to their teachers and, therefore, is of limited (or no) use in ongoing evaluations of teachers. Second, the state has offered little technical assistance on the use of longitudinal data to superintendents, principals, or teachers. If Oregon fails to commit to a top-tier data system—both in design and implementation—the state will receive less than its fair share of competitive stimulus dollars.

- **Build on Oregon’s pioneering work on the credit for proficiency model.** A number of Oregon school districts are at the leading edge of designing credit systems based on students’ knowledge and demonstrated skills rather than seat time. The work in Oregon has drawn national attention and investments from major foundations, and could be key to making the state competitive for Race to Top funds.

- **Boost substantially the rigor and supports of teacher induction practices.** Baby-boom teachers are poised to retire over the next two decades, and Oregon needs to revamp its teacher induction processes as a new generation of teachers prepare to enter our schools. An induction blueprint from the Brookings Institution calls for in-depth evaluations of novices that would incorporate student growth data, increased professional development and mentoring and observations, and quality standards that would deny tenure to up to a quarter of incoming teachers.

- **Improve the reliability and value of evaluations of tenured teachers.** In a 2004 statewide survey, more than 40 percent of Oregon teachers reported they had been observed less than 15 minutes in the previous year. Districts need more time and resources to implement fair and reliable systems...
that provide ongoing feedback to teachers based on multiple observations and objective measures of student achievement. The award-winning approach used by the Toledo, Ohio school district, which employs consulting teachers who collaborate with principals on evaluations, could serve as a foundation for a new Oregon model.

- **Design new career paths and compensation systems for teachers and principals.** The Administration has embraced alternative compensation and career ladder models like those supported through Chalkboard’s CLASS Project.

- **Invest strategically in extended learning time for students struggling to meet benchmarks.** The Center for American Progress puts extended learning time at the top of its education agenda but recognizes that evidence underlying the reform is mixed at best. To improve the likelihood of success, districts could design programs that boost the rigor of the extra time and deliver other evidence-based interventions (e.g., one-on-one reading tutors).

- **Apply evidence based policy to dropout prevention.** Oregon’s made good progress on reducing dropouts during the past decade but considerable room for improvement remains. In past papers, Chalkboard has recommended that school districts pilot Check and Connect—a Minnesota program proven to reduce dropout rates in multiple experimental trials.

- **Reinforce the successful ASPIRE model.** A recent Oregon Community Foundation study found that college-going rates in high schools served by ASPIRE exceeded those of non-ASPIRE schools—holding constant the socioeconomic characteristics of the attending students. However, significant room for improvement exists and, by using data to identify students who could be “tipped” into college-going with a little additional information, the program could increase its success rate.

**CHALKBOARD AS A PARTNER**

Chalkboard looks forward to collaborating with school districts as they develop concepts and applications for competitive grants under ARRA. Through its work on CLASS, Chalkboard is well positioned to apply for resources under the Teacher Incentive Fund to extend the innovative program to additional districts. We would also consider partnering on district applications for the What Works and Innovation Fund if the proposed projects align with our strategic vision, which is focused on teacher quality, early grade interventions, and proven strategies to reduce dropouts. Finally, we are always interested in serving as a sounding board and are willing to share research to support applications.