

Evangeline Parish Schools

"Our Children, Our Schools, Our Future"

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INFORMATIONAL STATEMENT REGARDING RACE TO THE TOP INITIATIVE

In an effort to answer any questions you may have regarding the decision of the Evangeline Parish School Board not to participate in the Race to the Top Initiative, I have been asked to share information with you that may clarify our position. The discussion of the state's plan to submit a grant application to the US Department of Education began at least a year before the actual guidelines were disseminated to the parishes. Staff members, board members, and I attended several meetings, participated in conference calls, and read extensively before making a final recommendation to the full Board. We considered not only the models listed below, but also a new evaluation instrument for teachers which includes a "value-added" requirement. When we use the term value-added, we are speaking about student performance being used to gauge a teacher's effectiveness in the classroom, and that performance would count for fifty-percent of a teacher's evaluation. Incentive pay would be part of the plan as well.

The USDOE School Intervention Models to be considered:

Turnaround: Put in place new leadership and a majority of new staff, new governance, and improved instructional programs, and provide the school with sufficient operational flexibilities such as the ability to select staff, control budget, and expand learning time.

Restart: Convert a school or close and reopen under a charter (CMO) or educational management organization (EMO).

School Closure: Close the school and place its students in a high-performing school within the district.

Transformation: Hire a new principal and implement a suite of best practices including comprehensive instructional management reform. The suite mirrors those available to all schools through the R2T Louisiana Education Reform.

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The Intervention Models and the new performance evaluation instrument presented some very serious issues for this Board. For example, should the district choose new leadership and change fifty-percent of a school's staff, what happens to these faculty members? Who is moved in?

There were two very tempting components to the initiative: Schools in the High-performance Schools Initiative would receive a suspension of the effects of accountability for four years. At the conclusion of the four years, any school that had not risen above the then-approved accountability bar would re-enter the accountability timeline where it left off.

The second component was the infusion of federal monies into the system to support the initiative; however, the district would be expected to "sustain" the initiatives once funds were no longer available under R2T. In one of the conference calls, State Superintendent Paul Pastorek said, "If you cannot sustain it, do not apply."

Once the application process was completed by the districts, only twenty-eight chose to enter Race to the Top. As superintendent, I did not recommend our participation for two reasons: 1) The parish could not sustain the initiatives given the economic forecast of the state and the parish; 2) The staff and I did not feel that we could embrace any of the four models without causing a disruption to our system as well as my concern that there could possibly be a conflict between the initiative and our on-going desegregation case. I feel that we made the proper decision based on our circumstances—as Mr. Pastorek also stated, "Race to the Top will not fit the needs of every district in the state." Although we will not be an active participant in the initiative, we will have the opportunity to apply for mini grants if the state is awarded the grant. If we have a specific need that falls within the guidelines, the parish will submit a mini grant.

Submitted by



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