



n Case You Missed It: Support of NJEA Required for Grant

Friday, March 26, 2010 • Tags: [Education](#)

Bret Schundler – “The Learning Of Children Should Be The Yardstick By Which Everyone Involved With Public Education Is Evaluated.”

New Jersey's public schools recently lost an opportunity to win \$400 million in federal grant funds through President Barack Obama's Race to the Top initiative.

As the state's new commissioner of education, I was disappointed the grant application put in by the Corzine administration failed, but I was not surprised. For a state's grant application to be approved, the Obama administration requires that local school and teacher union leaders commit to support the initiative's objectives. The application for funds put in by New Jersey had phenomenal support from local school board presidents and superintendents, but very little from union leaders. This doomed New Jersey's application and cost our public schools hundreds of millions of dollars.

The reason the New Jersey Education Association encouraged local union leaders not to support Obama's program is that it requires grant-receiving school districts to take student learning into account when evaluating the performance of teachers. The union fears that school districts will judge teachers unfairly.

To provide an example, imagine a fifth-grade teacher whose students come into his classroom reading at a first-grade level. If that teacher gets his students to advance three grade levels by the end of the year, he would have accomplished something great. But the union fears he might be judged a failure by his school district since his students never fully reached grade level.

I want to assure New Jersey's teachers that this fear is unnecessary. The kind of evaluation methodologies that are encouraged by Obama, that are supported by Gov. Chris Christie and I, and that were included in the grant application submitted by Corzine all take into account an educator's particular students. These methodologies would all properly identify the fifth-grade teacher in the above example as a superstar. Far from treating him unfairly, they would ensure that his excellent work was recognized — and, in so doing, help attract highly talented teachers into the New Jersey classrooms where they are most desperately needed.

New Jersey will be submitting a second grant application for federal Race To The Top dollars. I would like to implore the NJEA to support the state's resubmission. The union's support will open the door to hundreds of millions of federal dollars flowing to our schools.

Our New Jersey schools need this money. Moreover, the Obama administration has signaled that, going forward, an increasingly large share of federal education dollars will be tied to the very same requirements. If the NJEA holds fast to its current position, not just hundreds of millions of dollars, but ultimately billions of federal education dollars, could end up going elsewhere.

Besides, the president is right. The learning of children should be the yardstick by which everyone involved with public education is evaluated. We need to care about whether the children in our classrooms are learning. We can't judge ourselves great educators if, at the end of the day, we don't actually demonstrate any ability to help children learn.

###

Press Contact:
Michael Drewniak
609-777-2600

Stay Connected with Social Media



Stay Connected with Email Alerts

Sign Up

LIKE THIS PAGE? SHARE IT WITH YOUR FRIENDS.

