



Written by [Sam Blumenfeld](#) on January 28, 2011

## Race to the Top for More Federal Control

Race to the Top, which President Obama glowingly spoke of in his dismal State of the Union address, is a \$4.35 billion U.S. Department of Education boondoggle to get state and local education systems to adopt national reforms affecting curriculum and teacher preparation. Its stated aim is to encourage charter schools, improve teacher instruction, and get state systems to adopt common academic standards. Teacher unions don't particularly care for the charter school idea.



But the real aim of the program is to create a national education system conducted from Washington, much like the centralized systems in Europe and Asia. The money of course is the incentive for states to comply with so-called national standards. In countries without a Constitution like our own, such national standards can be imposed on a nation whether or not the people want them. But in the U.S., states have to be bribed to give up their independence.

It should be noted that \$4.35 billion is more than 4 thousand million dollars. Probably more good could be accomplished by giving 4,350 small businesses a million dollars each to spur economic growth. But that would be no more legitimate than what the federal government is now doing in education. Perhaps an exemption from taxation would be a better way to create jobs.

The funding for the program comes from the ED Recovery Act as part of the American Recovery Reinvestment Act of 2009. Instead of using that money to pay off some of our enormous federal government debt, it will be used to feather the nests of those educators who know how to compete and apply for grants as they pretend to improve education. As long as they can fill out the complicated forms showing that they are able to comply with all of the conditions set forth in the program, the money will be awarded.

The program was announced by President Obama and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan on July 24, 2009. By now all but eight states have applied for the grants. Already Florida and New York have been awarded \$700 million each, \$500 million to Tennessee, \$400 million to Georgia, North Carolina, and Ohio, \$250 million to Massachusetts and Maryland, \$100 million to Delaware and \$75million to Rhode Island. Does anyone really believe that the money will make any difference in the quality of education in those states?

If one examines the history of the federal government's throwing money at the public schools, one finds that conditions have only gotten worse. Literacy skills have declined, math and science have seen no discernable improvement in student achievement. But we keep doing the same thing over and over again, which is a symptom of insanity

The state of Texas has refused to take part in the program. Gov. Rick Perry has said that the Obama administration's grant program is an unacceptable intrusion in the education system of Texas, even



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though Texas education officials and a consulting firm financed by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation had been working on preparing the application forms to receive a hefty grant from the ED.

“We would be foolish and irresponsible,” Gov. Perry said, “to place our children’s future in the hands of unelected bureaucrats and special-interest groups thousands of miles away in Washington.”

However, Terry Grier, Superintendent of the Houston Independent School District, disagreed with the Governor. “I’m disappointed,” he said. “It was potentially a lot of money for our state. I’m not one to sell my soul for money, but I have 100,000 kids in Houston who don’t read at grade level, and I don’t agree with people who say resources don’t make a difference.”

When the Houston schools decide to adopt a good intensive phonics reading program, such as Alpha-Phonics, or Sue Dickson’s Sing Spell Read & Write, their reading problem will disappear. The money they are presently spending on reading programs that don’t work is a waste of resources. Apparently Supt. Grier has never read “Why Johnny Can’t Read” by Rudolf Flesch. It was published in 1955, probably before he was born.

The father of all federal programs to improve education is The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, signed into law by President Johnson, which has thrown several trillion dollars at education with no discernable positive results. Title One of that act, Compensatory Education, has not improved literacy among the culturally deprived minority it was supposed to help. What it did was create a Title One establishment composed of directors, assistant directors, special ed teachers in each school district. They now have a vested interest in making sure that the reading problem is never solved, because a solution would put them all out of work. The last thing these “educators” want are reading programs which would make Title One unnecessary.

As for the Race to the Top, there are no lack of critics who see it differently from the way the President or his Secretary of Education see it. The teachers’ unions don’t like it because of the emphasis on charter schools, which, by the way, are public schools with fewer rules and regulations. Diane Ravitch, a long-time critic of the public schools, said that evidence “shows clearly that choice, competition and accountability as education reform levers are not working.”

A coalition of civil rights organizations, including the Urban League, the NAACP Legal Defense Fund and the Rainbow Push Coalition released a statement that “Such an approach reinstates the antiquated and highly politicized frame for distributing federal support to states that civil rights organizations fought to remove in 1965.”

So the Race to the Top may eventually find itself at the bottom of all of these futile reform efforts to improve education. The only real way that education will be improved is if the government gets out of the education business and leaves it up to the private sector to provide educational services to the American public. Private schools and home- schooling are thriving while the public schools struggle to teach children to read.

But even though the message is clear, our politicians are blinded by piles of money in the billions and trillions, while socialist control freaks see the government schools as the means of harnessing the young for future service to the socialist state. Sanity and reason no longer reign in American public schools. Only confusion and failure greet the children at the public school door.

The Race to the Top is in reality a race to the bottom, for more government education means more failure, more frustration, and more unhappiness for millions of American children. We should all be happy that over a million children are being home-schooled by their parents, are learning to read and



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write, are being taught traditional American history, and are being prepared to become the leaders of an increasingly illiterate nation. And none of it is costing the American taxpayer a dime. That's progress!



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