



State of Tennessee

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Comptroller's Report Examines Use of Race to the Top Funds

Tennessee school districts are using Race to the Top funds to implement a wide variety of programs designed to improve student performance, according to a report released today by the Tennessee Comptroller of the Treasury's Offices of Research and Education Accountability (OREA). Among other planned expenditures, school districts intend to use their shares of the money to fund instructional coaches with specialized training, incentive pay for teachers and leadership courses.

The report, "Scopes of Work: How Select Districts Are Using Race to the Top Funds," profiles a sample of school districts and how they intend to spend their share of Race to the Top funds.

The U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) awarded Tennessee approximately \$500 million in Race to the Top funding in March of 2010. The funds will be distributed over a four-year period. USDOE required Tennessee to split the funds evenly between state and local expenditures. The \$250 million for local expenditures will be distributed in grants based on scopes of work documents school districts filed with the Tennessee Department of Education.

Individual district grants range from approximately \$44,665 (Richard City Special School District) to \$68.6 million (Memphis City Schools). Most districts (70 out of 136) received grants between \$500,000 and \$2 million for the four-year period.

School districts' scopes of work show considerable diversity, both in the programs and activities they have chosen to fund and the time frames for the expenditures. In total, districts chose to spend approximately \$20 million for instructional coaches. These are experienced teachers with knowledge of research-based instructional strategies. They train school personnel and help implement best practices.

Other notable expenses included school leadership training, at \$17.5 million, and differentiated pay plans, at \$16.9 million. Differentiated pay plans offer bonuses, including performance or signing bonuses, which supplement teacher salaries and provide additional pay for teaching hard to staff subjects or hard to staff schools.

Many districts chose to frontload their spending in the first year of the grants and decrease spending incrementally over the next three years.

“School districts are spending their Race to the Top funds on a number of strategies for improving student achievement,” said Nneka Norman-Gordon, OREA legislative research analyst and co-author of the report. “Time will tell if these spending decisions have the desired effects. OREA will continue to monitor district results.”

OREA is an agency within the Comptroller’s Office that is charged with providing accurate and objective policy research and analysis for the Tennessee General Assembly and the public.

The legislative brief may be viewed at: <http://www.comptroller1.state.tn.us/OREA/>

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