



DECEMBER 10, 2009

# e-BLACKBOARD

SCARIANO, HIMES & PETRARCA

## RACE TO THE TOP

School districts should be aware that the Illinois State Board of Education (“ISBE”) is applying to the federal government for “Race to the Top” (“RT3”) funds. RT3 is a federally funded program offering competitive grant money for which states can apply. In order for a state to receive the grant money, school district involvement is required. ISBE will seek \$400 million in grant funds. Participating school districts are entitled to directly receive a portion of the grant funds awarded to Illinois, if, in fact, Illinois receives an award. It is unknown at this time how the grant money will be divided among the participating school districts.

School districts are not required to participate in the RT3 program, but may choose to do so. In order to be a “participating” school district, a school district must agree to implement the State educational goals and objectives as set forth in a Memorandum of Understanding (“MOU”), drafted by ISBE and attached to the RT3 application. The educational goals and objectives must implement a systemic approach to each of the educational reform areas specified in the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (the “stimulus act”). Those reform areas are:

1. Making progress toward rigorous college- and career- ready standards and high-quality assessments that are valid and reliable for all students, including English language learners and students with disabilities;
2. Establishing pre-K – to - college and career data systems that track progress and foster continuous improvement;
3. Making improvements in teacher effectiveness and in the equitable distribution of qualified teachers for all students, particularly students who are most in need; and
4. Providing intensive support and effective interventions for the lowest-performing schools.

If a school district chooses to comply with the requirements of the MOU, it may be entitled to receive RT3 grant money directly from the federal government, and is also entitled to receive grant money from ISBE.

If a school district is unable to comply with the requirements of the MOU, it may become an “involved” school district, whereby it agrees to assist the state in statewide reform implementations, and through such cooperation, may be entitled to receive funding.

ISBE is finalizing its proposed goals and is working to complete the MOU that it intends to submit with its application for RT3 funds. The MOU was to be released for review this week. You may find it on ISBE’s website when it is released.

Scariano, Himes and Petrarca, Chtd., recommends that all of its school district clients review the MOU to determine whether they are able to comply with the requirements and can work toward the goals therein. If so, it may be of benefit to the school district and to the State’s overall application to sign the MOU. School districts only have a short time to decide whether they will participate in RT3; the application is due to the U.S. Department of Education on January 19, 2010. Thus, ISBE asks that all school districts that wish to participate sign the MOU and return it to ISBE on or before January 11, 2010.

Please do not hesitate to contact Scariano, Himes and Petrarca, Chtd., with any additional questions about RT3.

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