



Tennessee Diploma Project

Race to the Top January 2010

Tennessee embarks on Race to the Top

Race to the Top (RTTT) is a unique opportunity for the State of Tennessee to seriously be in the running for \$501 million academic grant dollars. These funds are available for education through the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA)*. In April, winning states will be awarded monies to improve education in four areas: building and expanding the system of student assessment already in place; preparing students for college and the work force; recruiting, keeping and re-



Governor Bredesen talks to Mt. Juliet High School Students about the importance of science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) initiatives.

warding productive teachers and principals; and providing effective intervention and intensive support for the lowest performing schools.

Under the leadership of Governor Bredesen and Education Commissioner Timothy Webb, Tennessee has submitted an impressive **Race to the Top** application. It builds on goals of the **Tennessee Diploma Project (TDP)**, but also emphasizes the state's readiness to implement necessary educational reform. This highly com-

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"The stars have aligned this year to create opportunities to make significant improvements in public education in Tennessee. When that happens, we're obligated as public officials to seize the moment . . . that moment is now." Governor Phil Bredesen, January 12, 2010

Legislators Support Race to the Top

On January 15th, the Tennessee General Assembly passed the "Tennessee First to the Top Act of 2010", addressing proposed educational reform and positioning Tennessee as a leader in the Race to the Top competition. The bill changed how teachers are evaluated and how the State can approach failing schools.

Previously, state law prohibited the use of student performance data for the first three years of an educator's employment. It specifically banned the use of this data until after a decision was made to grant the teacher tenure. The new legislation now requires all annual evaluations of teachers be based on 50 percent student achievement data. Thirty-five percent will be comprised of Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System, or growth data, (www.tennessee.gov/education/assessment/doc/TVAAS_Fact_Sheet.pdf) and another 15 percent derived from other student testing measures.

The bill also authorizes the state's education commissioner to take bold actions to improve chronically failing schools by placing them in an "Achievement School District", aimed at turning the school around, building capacity and returning the school to the original district.



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petitive race will be **won** by only a small number of states who are bold in their educational ideas and not satisfied with “*business as usual*”.

With last year’s implementation of the **TDP** our state’s educational leaders acknowledged the need to better prepare graduating high school seniors to be college- or career-ready. By requiring all students in Tennessee to complete a rigorous curriculum in high school, the state is helping those students leave high school with the knowledge and skills they need for lifelong success-regardless of their immediate post-high school plans. For more details, visit www.tn.gov/education/TDP/index.shtml.

Statistics now show more than two-thirds of new jobs will require some type of post-secondary education and training, mandating a greater focus on the skills needed for college and the workforce. For those graduates entering college, the **TDP** is committed to preparing them to take entry level college courses without the need for remedial instruction, increasing the chance for success.

The **Race to the Top** proposal and the **TDP** include a focus on strategic assessments which include early and regular evaluations of student learning. These assessments will be the key to providing teachers and principals with a dashboard view of each student. This data can be utilized to intervene or recreate successful teaching methods.

Another component of Tennessee’s **Race to the Top** proposal is the adoption of the **Common Core State Standard Initiatives**. This effort, coordinated by governors and state commissioners of education across the nation is a commitment to develop standards in English-language arts and math for grades K-12.

These standards will be aligned with college and work expectations, embracing a strong and challenging curriculum and will promote the application of knowledge through problem solving, analysis and critical thinking. While the **TDP** has already



Tennessee students stand to benefit from real-world standards and college- and career-focused curriculum.

introduced aggressive goals and measurements, adoption of these initiatives will ultimately allow us to develop a consistent way to evaluate and compare Tennessee students to those across the nation. It is more important than ever to provide standards aligned with real world demands, so all students are prepared to succeed in our global economy and society.

With Tennessee’s commitment to the **TDP** and the Legislature’s move to change state law to help us succeed, Tennessee is now in a very good position to win this competition and advance the goals of the **Tennessee Diploma Project**.

For more information, please visit
<http://tn.gov/education/recovery.shtml#RTTT>.