



SCHOOL BOARD OF POLK COUNTY

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Much talk and media coverage has been placed on the subject of the federally- funded, voluntary grant program Race to the Top. Florida is applying as a state but each school district had the option to participate providing the stipulations of the grant could be met and negotiated. The federal program has general outlines and accountability pieces attached to it, but each state has the option to interpret and prescribe the conditions, standards and factors placed upon participating school districts.

The Florida Department of Education (FDOE) had given school districts three options: 1) apply as a Participating District, 2) apply as an Involved District and 3) elect to not apply. Participating Districts are subject to the FDOE Memorandum of Understanding and thus, the Scope of Work the state has outlined in order to receive grant funds through the state. There are several factors associated with the distribution of funds, such as the number of counties which apply and how much the FDOE will keep. It is our understanding that the FDOE will keep half of the funds for administration purposes. The remainder of the funds will be distributed based on the number of counties that qualify by August 2010.

Involved Districts will be able to apply for competitive grants only. The amount of monies available is not known at this time but FDOE has communicated that a portion of the money they keep will be available for competitive grants.

Armed with the Scope of Work included in the Memorandum of Understanding with FDOE information, Polk County staff immediately began to research and evaluate this initiative as to its merits and challenges. Each element of the Plan, prescribed by the FDOE, was carefully scrutinized. Areas of concern were identified and included an inordinate number of unknown factors and conditions, necessary resource allocations, the short timeframe of development and implementation, and sustainability after funding ceases, to name a few.

School districts were given the deadline of January 12, 2010, to submit the Memorandum of Understanding in order to apply as a Participating District.

After an initial presentation to the school board in December, 2009, an in-depth presentation was given by the superintendent and her staff to the school board during the January 12th Work Session. After much discussion and deliberation, the consensus of the school board was for Polk County to become an Involved District for this grant. Their conclusion was predicated on the fact that the resources needed to implement this plan were far greater than the financial benefit of the 4-year grant. As a result, the school district will apply for any competitive grants associated with this federally funded program.

Thank you for your continued interest and support of Polk County Public Schools. Please be assured that the school district's leadership is committed to serving the instructional needs of our students and will continue to seek every viable, effective opportunity in order to provide a quality public education.

Sincerely,

Gail F. McKinzie, Ph.D.
Superintendent