

N.J. receives \$38 million in Race to the Top education funding | NJ.com

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Reena Rose Sibayan/The Jersey Journal

Acting Education Commissioner Christopher Cerf, right, looks on while Gov. Chris Christie speaks in this file photo. The state has been awarded \$38 million in Race to the Top funding to bolster Christie's education agenda.

TRENTON — New Jersey has been awarded nearly \$38 million in federal Race to the Top funding to bolster Gov. Chris Christie's education reform agenda, including plans to use test scores to evaluate teacher performance.

The funding was awarded after the state lost out on \$460 million in two previous rounds of the Race to the Top competition, including a failed bid last week for \$60 million that would have benefited pre-schoolers statewide.

"This award today will help give educators in New Jersey the tools they need to be successful and the support to meet our reform agenda goals," Christie said in a statement.

New Jersey and six other states qualified to share \$200 million in this round of competition because they were all named finalists in the earlier rounds. The other winners this time are Arizona, Colorado, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana and Pennsylvania.

Thursday's award is less than 10 percent of the hundreds of millions previously lost, but the state's acting education commissioner, Christopher Cerf, said the money will still help "accelerate the tide of reform across New Jersey."

A spokesman for the state Department of Education said half the award will go to districts that agree to participate in the programs the money will fund. The other half will be used to implement a new teacher evaluation system and develop new lessons and tests for core subject areas.

Previous rounds of Race to the Top competition, President Obama's signature education initiative, were fiercely competitive. This time, the state simply needed to properly

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submit a pared down version of its original proposal to secure the funding.

The New Jersey Education Association, the state's largest teachers union, fiercely opposed the application submitted by the Christie administration in May 2010. A union spokesman described this award as "less than a drop in the bucket."

"It eludes me how this will have a lasting impact," the spokesman, Steve Wollmer, said. "This is one-time money that will help set up some pilot programs. At this point, our attention is on the legislative debate."

U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan said he was "impressed" with New Jersey's efforts to bolster college and career readiness under the leadership of Christie and Cerf.

"We wanted to make sure states were still committed to their original plans, still driving reform and still willing to invest in those plans," Duncan said. "We feel great investing money in these states."

New Jersey is among 21 states that have been awarded federal funding since Obama and Duncan announced the \$4 billion Race to the Top program in 2009. An application error cost the state \$400 million in an earlier round of competition.

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