

# NEW YORK POST

New York, New York

March 30, 2010

## Race to the top: how to win round 2

**By THOMAS W. CARROLL**

Yesterday, New York state officially lost Round 1 of the federal \$4 billion Race to the Top competition. To get it together to win the funds on offer in Round 2, lawmakers will have to stop buying the teachers-union line.

The US Department of Education's decision to award Round 1 grants only to Tennessee and Delaware leaves a lot of money still on the table -- but also leaves New York facing stiff (and likely growing) competition for Round 2.

New York's low ranking in the "sweet 16" -- the finalists considered seriously in Round 1 -- makes it clear that the unions were wrong when they told legislators that they could make a minor tweak here or there, without raising the charter-school cap or addressing New York's "data firewall," which prevents schools from using student data in evaluating teachers.

Their mistaken advice cost the state of New York \$700 million.

And the reforms that might have worked in Round 1 likely won't be enough in Round 2. New York now needs a "charter cap"-plus strategy.

That is, lawmakers must lift the cap on the number of charter schools -- without adding the union-designed poison pills that they tried to slip through earlier this year. But that's just a start on what's needed.

So what does the Legislature need to do?

1) Bring the charter cap way up -- from the current limit of 200 schools to 460 schools or more. And, again, those "poison pills" are deal-killers -- they'd cost us points in the competition. No "regional caps" on charter enrollment, and no limits on locating charters in city Department of Education space. (And stop trying to take away charter-issuing authority from the SUNY trustees, who have a solid record of good decisions.)

2) Address the one fair point critics raised: New York charters need to address better special education and English-language-learner populations. But the answer here is to let charters give such students preference in admission lotteries -- not to impose quotas, as the unions proposed.

To make this practical, charters must also be allowed to contract with local Boards of Cooperative Educational Services and to set up cooperative arrangements among charter schools to educate difficult-to-serve students. These measures would gain Race to the Top points.

3) End that "data firewall": This expires at the end of June, anyway -- but we need it gone by June 1, the deadline for Round 2 applications.

4) Strengthen and pass the Regents proposal for requiring all teacher evaluations to consider student data in the future.

Tennessee, a winning state, requires 50 percent of a teacher evaluation to be based on student results. The Regents didn't specify a percentage -- so systems could skate by barely using this data. That simply won't cut it.

5) Give the Regents direct authority to close bad schools and to replace dysfunctional school boards.

There are a few other issues, too technical to discuss here, but the above is the core of it.

As they head into a stormy fall election season, state legislators must decide whether they want to permanently throw away New York's chance at \$700 million in education funds, or embrace this five-part agenda.

*Thomas W. Carroll is president of the Foundation for Education Reform & Accountability.*