

From The Bully's Pulpit 14

Christie reneges on \$400M "Race to the Top" agreement

NJEA President Barbara Keshishian today expressed "deep disappointment, utter frustration, and total outrage" at Gov. Chris Christie's decision to renege on agreements reached last week with NJEA and other stakeholders in finalizing the state's "Race To The Top" application.

"Gov. Christie's decision to pull the plug on last Thursday's agreed-upon 'Race To The Top' application will greatly jeopardize New Jersey's chances of getting \$400 million in federal education funding over the next four years," Keshishian said. "This is a classic case of 'bait and switch.'

"Instead of supporting the application agreed to by his Commissioner and staff, Gov. Christie has decided to submit his own application, and to unilaterally remove the support of NJEA and hundreds of its local presidents from it," Keshishian said, adding that NJEA only learned about the governor's decision after placing a call to Education Commissioner Bret Schundler to check the status of the state's application. "We greeted the news with a mixture of deep disappointment, utter frustration, and total outrage," Keshishian said.

"Just last Thursday, Commissioner Schundler said: 'We are extremely pleased that the 200,000-member NJEA has agreed to endorse our application and its bold reform agenda designed to improve education in New Jersey.' "What happened to that sentiment?"

"For months, Gov. Christie and Commissioner Schundler said they wanted NJEA's support for the Phase II application, and we responded. We put a team of people together to research the best practices that would not only comply with RTTT's guidelines, but also lead to better instruction and higher student achievement," Keshishian said. "The biggest losers in this entire fiasco are the state's 1.4 million students," Keshishian added.

"We met repeatedly and talked in detail with Commissioner Schundler and Deputy Commissioner Willa Spicer, and were in constant contact with them in order to reach agreement last Thursday - and to give NJEA adequate time to contact our local association presidents to urge them to join us in signing on. Hundreds of them had signed on as of this morning.

"Rather than put his support behind the agreement that his own Commissioner negotiated, Gov. Christie is insisting on an application that seeks to replace collaboration between teachers with competition for inadequate bonuses; an application that seeks to threaten teachers' jobs rather than give them the confidence to take on new challenges.

"In April, the governor wrote on his blog that he was hoping to submit a Race To The Top application with 'sufficient support from New Jersey's education stakeholders - including the NJEA,'" Keshishian said. "Now, we learn that despite all that hard work - and the long-overdue collaboration that New Jerseyans want between Gov. Christie and NJEA - the governor has once again chosen the path of conflict."

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P.E.A. Rejects Christie's "Race to the Top" Treachery Reprehensible Reversal Rejected

On May 28, the Association was approached by the District after the NJEA and Commissioner Schundler had worked out a compromise position on the applications for the federal "Race to the

Top” application. After some discussion, P.E.A. President Pete Tirri sent Dr. Evans the following letter:

May 28, 2010

Dr. Donnie W. Evans
State District Superintendent of Schools
Paterson Public Schools
90 Delaware Avenue
Paterson, New Jersey 07503

Re: Race to the Top Federal Grant Application

Dear Dr. Evans,

Please accept this correspondence as an indication in good faith of my support for New Jersey’s Phase II application for a Race to the Top federal grant As the president of the Paterson Education Association as stated in the federal guidelines (Federal Register/Vol. 74/Wednesday Nov. 18, 2009/Rules and Regulations/59727-59728), I understand that “State reform plans should not undermine collective bargaining agreements.”

I recognize that once the state has made its completed application available, I will have the right to withdraw my support if I feel that its principles violate the rights of my members or do not serve in the best educational interests of my students or community.

The Paterson Education Association, while affiliated with the New Jersey Education Association, is an entity unto itself with governance bodies which have organizational policy responsibilities. P.E.A received partial information related to the Phase II application for the Race to the Top federal grant on Friday, May 28 making it impossible to bring those governance bodies together for discussion on the decision to participate in this application. Therefore, I must reserve the right to withdraw support for this application should the governance bodies determine that the application violates the rights expressed above.

Sincerely,

Peter A. Tirri

President
Paterson Education Association
445 Straight Street
Paterson, New Jersey 07501
Office Phone (973) 881-9445
Office Fax (973) 881-9440

Shortly thereafter, Tirri requested that the members of the Association’s Executive Board be released on June 1 to discuss the amended application, a necessary step if the Association was going to support the application. The request for release was approved by Dr. Evans, and the meeting took place. In the middle of the discussion on the situation, P.E.A. learned that Christie had turned his back on the settlement application, and reinstated major provisions including merit pay and tenure changes which were unacceptable to NJEA, and P.E.A.

As a result, the Executive Board sent the following to Dr. Evans:

June 1, 2010

Dr. Donnie W. Evans
State District Superintendent of Schools
Paterson Public Schools
90 Delaware Avenue
Paterson, New Jersey 07503

Dear Dr. Evans,

I would like to thank you for agreeing to the release of the members of the Association's Executive Board so that we could consider Association participation with the Paterson Public School District in the New Jersey Race to the Top Phase II Application. As you will remember, I had indicated in my Conditional Approval letter of May 28 that the Association was anxious to partner with the District in this effort with the understanding the application's principles did not "...violate the rights of my members or do not serve in the best educational interests of my students or community."

The Executive Board members were therefore stunned by the news that the Commissioner and the Governor had decided to renege on their agreement and revert to the onerous provisions over which the NJEA and the Commissioner's Office had negotiated and reached settlement.

Based upon the unfortunate actions of the Governor and the Commissioner, please be advised that Paterson Education Association's Executive Board unanimously voted to oppose P.E.A.'s participation in the New Jersey Race to the Top Phase II Application. It is indeed unfortunate that the Governor refuses to work with the Associations throughout the state to improve educational opportunities that could come to fruition through collaboration. P.E.A. looks forward to working with you in future endeavors.

Sincerely,
Peter A. Tirri, President
Paterson Education Association
445 Straight Street
Paterson, New Jersey 07501
(973) 881-9445
PatEdAssn@aol.com

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LIAR LIAR MORE ON FIRE!

If you've got nothing else to do Wednesday night, why not let Commissioner Schundler know how disappointed you are that Christie wants to crush our union, not help our schools!

He'll be at Passaic County Technical Institute 45 Rhinehart Road (off Oldham Road) in Wayne at 6:30. Believe it or not, he plans to talk about Race to the Top!

Wear your asbestos coveralls so you don't get burned when he spontaneously bursts into flames!

