This Partnership Agreement ("Agreement") is entered into by and between the Indiana Department of Education ("Indiana" or "IDOE") and ________________________ ("Participating LEA"). The purpose of this Agreement is to establish a framework of collaboration, as well as to articulate specific roles and responsibilities in support of Indiana in its implementation of an approved Race to the Top grant project.

Recitals

1. Indiana’s students are not adequately prepared to compete in the global marketplace. The IDOE and the Participating LEA are fully and equally committed to aggressively pursuing reforms that level the playing field and remove all barriers to student academic achievement and career preparation.

2. Through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, Congress has allocated an unprecedented $4.3 billion for a competitive grant program, the Race to the Top.

3. The Race to the Top program is designed to reward those states that are creating the conditions for education innovation and reform and implementing comprehensive and systematic changes, addressing each of the following areas:
   a) Adopting internationally benchmarked standards and assessments that prepare students for success in college and the workplace;
   b) Recruiting, developing, retaining and rewarding effective teachers and principals;
   c) Building data systems that measure student success and inform teachers and principals how they can improve their practices; and
   d) Turning around struggling schools.

4. Recognizing the window of opportunity for meaningful change that has been opened by the Race to the Top, the IDOE and Participating LEA are devoted to the swift and full implementation of the uncompromising and necessary reforms contained in this Agreement, without alteration, if Indiana is selected for Race to the Top funding.

Now, Therefore, the IDOE and Participating LEA agree as follows:

Agreement

1) SCOPE OF WORK

The Preliminary Scope of Work, starting on page four of this Agreement, indicates which portions of Indiana’s proposed reform plans ("Fast Forward") the Participating LEA agrees to implement. The Participating LEA acknowledges that it must agree to implement all applicable portions of Fast Forward in order to participate in Indiana’s Race to the Top bid.
2) PROJECT ADMINISTRATION

A. PARTICIPATING LEA RESPONSIBILITIES

In assisting the IDOE in implementing the tasks and activities described in Indiana’s Race to the Top application, the Participating LEA:

1) As a condition for participating in – and receiving an allocation of funds under – the Fast Forward program, must enter into an agreement (the “Implementation Agreement”) with the IDOE that will describe more specifically the mutual responsibilities of the IDOE and Participating LEA for planning and implementing provisions of Fast Forward. The Implementation Agreement will be incorporated in or attached to the Work Plan, which must be provided to, and approved by, the IDOE.

The Implementation Agreement will include a detailed work plan (the “Work Plan”), prepared by the Participating LEA and approved by the IDOE, describing specific goals, activities, timelines, budgets, key personnel, and annual targets for key performance measures. The Work Plan must be consistent with the Participating LEA’s Preliminary Scope of Work in this Agreement, with the approved Fast Forward plan, and with further guidance the IDOE may provide. The IDOE will approve the Participating LEA for funding based on the scope and quality of the Work Plan and the Participating LEA’s capacity to implement the plan and address at the local level applicable portions of Fast Forward in a meaningful and high quality way. The Implementation Agreement between the IDOE and the Participating LEA will also detail the IDOE’s responsibilities for providing or coordinating technical assistance, professional development, and other support for the Participating LEA in carrying out these functions, and how IDOE and Participating LEA activities will be sequenced.

2) Will implement the Participating LEA plan as identified in the Preliminary Scope of Work of this agreement;

3) Will, over the course of the project, work in good faith with the IDOE to identify needs for modifications to the project and to make appropriate modifications in order to achieve the core goals of the project;

4) Will actively participate in all relevant convenings, communities of practice, or other practice-sharing events that are organized or sponsored by the IDOE or by the U.S. Department of Education (“ED”);

5) Will post to any website specified by the IDOE and/or ED, in a timely manner, all non-proprietary products and lessons learned that were developed using funds under the Race to the Top grant;

6) Will participate, as requested, in any evaluations of this grant conducted by the IDOE and/or ED;

7) Will be responsive to IDOE and/or ED requests for information including, but not limited to, requests regarding the status of the project based on program measures established by the IDOE, project implementation, outcomes, and any problems anticipated or encountered; and
8) Will participate in meetings and telephone conferences with the IDOE to discuss (a) progress of the project, (b) potential dissemination of resulting non-proprietary products and lessons learned, (c) plans for subsequent years of the Race to the Top grant period, and (d) other matters related to the Race to the Top grant and the Fast Forward plan.

B. IDOE RESPONSIBILITIES

In assisting the Participating LEA in implementing its tasks and activities described in Indiana’s Race to the Top application, the IDOE will:

1) Work collaboratively with, and support the Participating LEA in carrying out, the Participating LEA’s plan set forth in the Work Plan and in the Implementation Agreement;

2) Timely distribute the Participating LEA’s portion of Race to the Top grant funds during the course of the project period and in accordance with the Participating LEA’s approved Work Plan and with the IDOE’s established distribution schedule;

3) Provide feedback on the Participating LEA’s status updates, annual reports, any interim reports, and project plans and products; and

4) Provide or coordinate technical assistance, professional development, and support consistent with Section 2(A)(1) above.

C. JOINT RESPONSIBILITIES

1) The IDOE and the Participating LEA will collaborate in good faith to ensure alignment and coordination of IDOE and local planning and implementation activities in order to effectively and efficiently achieve the core goals of Fast Forward, consistent with their respective roles under Indiana law and policy;

2) The IDOE and the Participating LEA will each appoint a key contact person for the Race to the Top grant;

3) These key contacts from the IDOE and the Participating LEA will maintain frequent communication to facilitate cooperation under this Agreement;

4) IDOE and Participating LEA grant personnel will work together to determine appropriate timelines for project updates and status reports throughout the grant period.

5) IDOE and Participating LEA grant personnel will negotiate in good faith to continue to achieve the overall goals of Indiana’s Race to the Top grant, even when the Fast Forward plan requires modifications that affect the Participating LEA, or when the Participating LEA Work Plan requires modifications.
3) STATE RECURSSE FOR PARTICIPATING LEA NON-PERFORMANCE

If the IDOE determines that the Participating LEA is not meeting its goals, timelines, budget, or annual targets or is not fulfilling other applicable requirements as set forth in the Implementation Agreement or the Fast Forward plan, the IDOE will take appropriate enforcement action, which could include a collaborative process between the IDOE and the Participating LEA, or any of the enforcement measures that are detailed in 34 CFR section 80.43 including, for example, putting the Participating LEA on reimbursement payment status, temporarily withholding funds, or disallowing costs.

4) ASSURANCES

The Participating LEA hereby certifies and represents that it:

A. Has all requisite power and authority to execute this Agreement;

B. Is familiar with Indiana's Race to the Top grant application and is supportive of and will work to implement all applicable portions of the Fast Forward plan, as defined by the IDOE, and consistent with the Preliminary Scope of Work;

C. Will, if Indiana's application is funded, provide a Work Plan within the timeframe established by IDOE and ED;

D. Will enter into an Implementation Agreement with the IDOE; and

E. Will comply with all of the terms of the Race to the Top grant, the IDOE's subgrant, and all applicable federal and state laws and regulations, including laws and regulations applicable to the Race to the Top program and the applicable provisions of EDGAR (34 CFR Parts 75, 77, 79, 80, 82, 84, 85, 86, 97, 98 and 99).

5) MODIFICATIONS

This Agreement may be amended only by written agreement signed by each of the parties involved, and in consultation with ED.

6) DURATION/TERMINATION

This Agreement shall be effective, beginning with the date of the last signature hereon and, if a grant is received, ending upon the expiration of the grant project period, or upon mutual agreement of the parties, whichever occurs first.

Preliminary Scope of Work

Consistent with federal requirements and criteria, Fast Forward addresses education reforms in each of the areas prescribed by the RttT application. The plan articulates Indiana's policies and goals in each of these areas and an overall strategy for accomplishing and monitoring the goals. Many of the goals relate to what happens in school districts, schools, and classrooms. The goals can
only be accomplished if Participating LEAs work in coordination with the IDOE to plan and implement reforms at the local level in ways that are aligned with Indiana’s plan.

In signing this Partnership Agreement, the Participating LEA signifies its intent to be bound to the Fast Forward plan, to collaborate with the IDOE in modifying state and local plans over the course of the project as appropriate to achieve core goals, and to act in good faith in implementing Indiana’s Fast Forward plan in each of the areas described below. If the IDOE receives a RttT grant, allocation of funds to the Participating LEA will be contingent on the development of a detailed local Work Plan and an IDOE-Participating LEA Implementation Agreement that will describe local and IDOE responsibilities in these areas in greater detail.

Participating LEAs must agree to participate in each of the applicable elements of Indiana’s reform plans outlined below. The IDOE will determine if a particular element (e.g. Turnaround) is inapplicable to a Participating LEA.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements of State Reform Plans</th>
<th>LEA Participation (Y/N)</th>
<th>Comments from LEA (optional)</th>
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<td>B. Standards and Assessments</td>
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<td>- The LEA will participate in</td>
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<td>(B)(2) Supporting the state’s</td>
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<td>(B)(3) Supporting the transition to enhanced standards and high-quality assessments</td>
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<td>C. Data Systems to Support Instruction</td>
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<td>- The LEA will participate in implementing all aspects of Indiana’s Plan to develop, implement, and use a statewide longitudinal data system, including but not limited to the following:</td>
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<td>(C)(1) Supporting the state in fully implementing a statewide longitudinal data system</td>
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<td>(C)(3) Using data to improve instruction:</td>
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<td>(i) Use of local instructional improvement systems</td>
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<td>(ii) Professional development on use of data</td>
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<td>(iii) Availability and accessibility of data to researchers</td>
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<td>Elements of State Reform Plans</td>
<td>LEA Participation (Y/N)</td>
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<td><strong>D. Great Teachers and Leaders</strong> – The LEA will participate in implementing all aspects of Indiana’s Plan to develop and implement systems to enhance teacher and leader effectiveness, including but not limited to the following:</td>
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<td>(D)(1) Partnering with high-quality pathways for aspiring teachers and principals</td>
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<td>(D)(2) Improving teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance:</td>
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<td>(i) Measure student growth</td>
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<td>(ii) Implement evaluation systems</td>
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<td>(iii) Conduct annual evaluations</td>
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<td>(iv)(a) Use evaluations to inform professional development</td>
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<td>(iv)(b) Use evaluations to inform compensation, promotion, and retention</td>
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<td>(iv)(c) Use evaluations to inform tenure and/or full certification</td>
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<td>(iv)(d) Use evaluations to inform removal</td>
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<td>(D)(3) Ensuring equitable distribution of effective teachers and principals in:</td>
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<td>(i) High-poverty and/or high-minority schools</td>
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<td>(ii) Hard-to-staff subjects and specialty areas</td>
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<td>(D)(5) Providing effective support to teachers and principals through:</td>
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<tr>
<td>(i) Quality professional development</td>
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<td>(ii) Measure effectiveness of professional development</td>
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<td><strong>E. Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools</strong> – The LEA will participate in implementing all aspects of Indiana’s Plan to intervene and turn around the lowest-achieving schools, including but not limited to the following:</td>
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<td>(E)(1) Supporting state efforts to intervene in the lowest-achieving schools and LEA’s</td>
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<td>(E)(2) Turning around the lowest-achieving schools</td>
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SIGNATURES

**LEA Superintendent** (or equivalent authorized signatory) - required:

___________________________________________________________
Signature/Date

___________________________________________________________
Print Name/Title

**President of Local School Board** (or equivalent, if applicable):

___________________________________________________________
Signature/Date

___________________________________________________________
Print Name/Title

**Local Teachers’ Association Leader** (if applicable):

___________________________________________________________
Signature/Date

___________________________________________________________
Print Name/Title

**State Superintendent of Public Instruction** - required:
By its signature below, the State hereby accepts the LEA as a Participating LEA.

___________________________________________________________
Signature/Date

___________________________________________________________
Print Name/Title
DATE: December 18, 2009
TO: School Superintendents, Board Members, and Attorneys
FROM: Dave Emmert, ISBA General Counsel
RE: Certain Issues Concerning IDOE’s Race to the Top Partnership Agreement and Dr. Bennett’s Memorandum

Superintendents’ e-mails the morning of December 18 contained the Indiana Department of Education’s awaited Race to the Top Partnership Agreement (seven pages) and State Superintendent Bennett’s explanatory memorandum (13 pages). The signed “Agreement” is to be returned to the IDOE by no later than 5:00 p.m. on January 12, 2010.

This brief ISBA e-mail will deal with the limited issues of school board approval, board president signature, and collective bargaining law requirements.

School Board Approval and President Signature

Although the Race to the Top “Partnership Agreement” between school corporations and the State Department of Education is couched in terms of a contract, the ISBA legal staff is not convinced it is the type of “contract” that is contemplated by the Indiana Education Code at IC 20-26-4-8. This code section requires all contracts to be approved by a majority of all of the members of the school board and gives authority to the board president and secretary (or vice president in the absence of either) to sign the contract on behalf of the entire board.

The question arises whether a school board that is not scheduled to meet before the January 12 due date of the “Partnership Agreement” must hold a special meeting in order to approve the “contract.” The ISBA Legal Division is of the opinion that such a special meeting to approve this “Agreement” is not necessary.

The reason it is not necessary to hold a special meeting is that even if there is a legal duty for the board to approve this “Agreement” by a majority vote of all of its members, the School Powers Act at IC 20-26-5-4(19) permits the school board to ratify any action taken by a school employee or board member as long as the board had the authority to approve the action in advance. Because Indiana school boards had the legal authority to approve the IDOE “Partnership Agreement” in advance, they have the power to ratify the action of both their respective superintendents and board presidents who signed the “Agreement” in order to meet the January 12 deadline.

It is recommended that boards either approve the “Agreement” in advance of January 12, 2010 or ratify it at a meeting following said date. It is also advisable to do so by a vote that shows a majority of all of the members approved (as opposed to just a majority of those in attendance at the meeting). This is recommended to avoid potential litigation challenging the lack of sufficient votes to approve a “contract.”

Collective Bargaining Law Implications

ISBA has received calls regarding receipt of a letter from teacher union representatives demanding to exercise their rights to bargain and/or discuss the issues that make up the ingredients of the “Partnership Agreement.” In this writer’s opinion after a “quick” review of the seven-page “Agreement” does not indicate any areas that would directly and significantly impact teacher wages and wage-related
fringe benefits so that there would be a duty to bargain (or obtain a waiver from bargaining from the teachers’ exclusively representative).

Part (D)(2)(iv)(b) on page 6 of the “Agreement” comes the closest to the wage issue when it states that the LEA (the school corporation) will “participate in implementing all aspects of Indiana’s Plan to develop and implement systems to enhance teacher and leader effectiveness, including but not limited to ... Improving teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance: ... (iv)(b) Use evaluations to inform compensation, promotion, and retention...”

Because school corporations are only agreeing to participate in this endeavor at this preliminary stage in order for the State of Indiana to obtain “Race to the Top” dollars, it is this writer’s opinion that schools are not failing to bargain at this point in time. At some later point there may be such a duty, but not now.

Schools are advised, however, to offer to meet with the teachers’ exclusive representative in order to meet their Bargaining Law obligation to “discuss” the issues contained within the “Agreement” that impact working conditions and other statutorily required discussable matters before signing and returning the “Agreement” by 5:00 p.m. on January 12, 2010.

Conclusion

From a legal perspective, ISBA’s legal staff does not see that school board approval of this “Partnership Agreement” is obligating the board to do anything more than agree to participate in the State Department of Education’s effort to attempt to secure Race to the Top dollars to benefit education in this state. A board that approves this “Agreement” at this point in time may choose later not to individually participate in the program if the State is awarded monies to move forward with the program.

Secondly, should the local teachers’ association refuse to co-sign the “Agreement,” you are advised to submit the school’s portion.

David Emmert
General Counsel
Indiana School Boards Association
One North Capitol
Suite 1215
Indianapolis, IN 46204
317-639-0330, ext. 107
Fax: 317-639-3591
demmert@isba-ind.org
**Race to the Top**

**Memorandum of Understanding**

This Race to the Top (RttT) memorandum is entered into between the Monroe County Community School Corporation and the Monroe County Education Association (MCEA). It is intended to run concurrently with the parties’ collective bargaining agreement as if written therein. It is intended to establish conditions upon which the corporation may initiate pursuit of RttT and/or other Federal funding requiring changes in the parties’ collectively bargained provisions, salaries, benefits, and/or working conditions and/or practices related thereto. The terms and conditions of this RttT memorandum are as follows:

1) At the request of the Superintendent, the MCEA President will sign the school corporation’s LEA memorandum per procedures established by the State of Indiana.

2) The terms and conditions of the LEA memorandum notwithstanding, no changes in collectively bargained provisions, salaries, benefits, and/or working conditions or practices related thereto shall occur until and provided MCEA subsequently enters into a follow-up RttT memorandum with the school corporation specifying what changes, if any, will be made.

3) Any time before or after the parties sign the LEA memorandum and until such time as the parties may enter into a subsequent RttT memorandum, either party to this memorandum may withdraw its endorsement of seeking RttT or other Federal funding if such funding is contingent on the parties making changes in collectively bargained provisions, salary, benefits, and working conditions or practices related thereto of which changes one party or the other is unwilling to accept. To withdraw its endorsement, the moving party need only notify the other party in writing of its intention to do so.

4) Should the parties agree to modify collectively bargained salaries, benefits, and/or working conditions or practices related thereto, such modifications shall not take effect until such time as RttT and/or other Federal funding is forthcoming and shall only remain in effect for so long as such funding continues. At any time funding is not forthcoming or ceases, or at the expiration date of the parties’ collective bargaining agreement, whichever comes sooner, all collectively bargained provisions, salaries, benefits, and/or working conditions or practices related thereto shall revert to what they were prior to this RttT memorandum taking effect unless exceptions are mutually agreed upon by the parties. Indiana’s status quo collective bargaining law notwithstanding.

In witness and agreement to all of the above, the parties’ respective agents place and date their signatures below:

For the School Corporation:

____________________________/________

Its Agent                      Date

____________________________/________

Its Witness                    Date

For MCEA:

____________________________/________

Its Agent                      Date

____________________________/________

Its Witness                    Date
MEMORANDUM

TO: Indiana District Superintendents, Charter School Leaders, Local School Board Presidents, and Local Teachers’ Association Leaders

FROM: Tony Bennett, Indiana Superintendent of Public Instruction

SUBJECT: FAST FORWARD — Indiana’s Plan for Race to the Top (RttT)

DATE: Thursday, December 17, 2009

It's time to expect more from our students. It's time to start rewarding good teachers, stop making excuses for bad ones. It's time to demand results from government at every level. It's time to prepare every child, everywhere in America, to out-compete any worker, anywhere in the world.

~President Obama on Race to the Top~

The Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) will submit Indiana’s Race to the Top (RttT) application by January 19, 2010. This is an unprecedented opportunity to increase the speed and scope of reforms that will benefit every Hoosier student. Few states are as well-positioned as Indiana to receive this historic funding, and participating LEAs could receive the financial and strategic support necessary to implement key education reforms. This opportunity is all the more significant given the dire economic forecasts and may represent the only opportunity for additional education funding in Indiana for the foreseeable future.

IDOE encourages LEAs to voluntarily participate in Indiana’s RttT reform plan (Fast Forward) by signing a Partnership Agreement. Signing the agreement at this time ensures a participating LEA’s inclusion in the state’s RttT application. Following notice of a RttT award, participating LEAs will work with IDOE to complete related work plans. Failure to complete the necessary work plan and related implementation agreement, as further described in the partnership agreement, will make the LEA ineligible for participation in the RttT plan and for the receipt of related funds. Any LEA that does not return the partnership agreement cannot later decide to participate.

To be successful, Indiana’s RttT application must articulate and demonstrate our commitment to advancing reforms in four clearly specified areas, all of which mirror IDOE’s vision for state education reform:

- Adopting internationally-benchmarked standards and assessments that prepare students for success in college and the workplace;
- Building data systems that measure student success and inform teachers and principals how they can improve their practices;
- Recruiting, developing, retaining and rewarding effective teachers and principals; and
- Turning around struggling schools.

IDOE has created this Executive Summary to provide a thorough but manageable look at Indiana’s reform plan. The document reviews the four tenets of reform and outlines the main components of Fast Forward. Because RttT is a national competition, releasing our full application at this time would put our state at a competitive
disadvantage. Additionally, due to the length and detail required in the application, our entire plan is not complete. This overview is designed to familiarize key stakeholders with the salient details of Fast Forward and to provide them with the information necessary to determine their support and commitment to the state’s plan before signing a partnership agreement.

Participating LEAs will agree to implement a number of bold reforms reflecting each key area described above. Because this reform category will be scored more heavily than any other, effective teachers and school leaders will be a major focus of Fast Forward. Indiana’s plan will include components addressing teacher pay and promotion, meaningful evaluation and targeted professional development. Student growth and academic achievement are central to all aspects of our state’s application.

IDOE will work cooperatively with stakeholders from participating LEAs to develop an appropriate implementation plan that considers the unique circumstances in each district and best meets students’ needs.

Funding awarded through RttT will be distributed to participating LEAs according to U.S. Department of Education (ED) guidelines. Funding amounts for participating LEAs will be determined by the size of the award to IDOE and the level of participation by LEAs. Half of any funds awarded to Indiana will be distributed to participating LEAs based on their relative shares of Title I. Use of these dollars is not restricted to Title I activities but must be in accordance with Fast Forward. Remaining RttT funds are designated for statewide reform initiatives. To create greater equity among all LEAs, IDOE will consider Title I student population differences when distributing the state-designated funds to participating LEAs. In all cases, awarded funds must support identified education reform efforts that are outlined in Fast Forward.

The aggressive RttT timeline requires us to work quickly to submit Indiana’s application within the 60-day response period provided by ED. For an LEA to have an opportunity to receive an allocation of funds under Indiana’s RttT plan, a local superintendent must join with the local school board president and local teachers’ association leader to sign the attached partnership agreement. This agreement outlines the mutual responsibilities of the state and the LEA for planning and implementing provisions of Fast Forward. Participating LEAs must return their agreements to IDOE no later than 5:00 p.m. on Tuesday, January 12. No additional agreements will be accepted after this time. Signed agreements may be submitted via email to fastforward@doe.in.gov or faxed to 317-232-0744. IDOE will email a confirmation message to an email address provided by the LEA within 72 hours of receipt of the LEA’s signed agreement. If you do not receive this confirmation, please contact us at fastforward@doe.in.gov.

If Indiana receives an award under RttT, each participating LEA will work with IDOE to establish a detailed work plan. Work plans must be consistent with Fast Forward and must be approved by the state. If the state and a participating LEA are unable to agree to a final work plan, the partnership agreement becomes invalid, and the LEA will not be allowed to participate in the implementation of Fast Forward.

Please review the following materials carefully. We expect stakeholders to have additional questions, and I will be traveling with key IDOE staff members to hold informational meetings across the state in the coming weeks. IDOE will conduct meetings in the following locations:

- December 22 from 1:00 to 2:30 p.m. at the Central Indiana Education Service Center (6321 La Pas Trail in Indianapolis)
- December 28 from 9:00 to 10:30 a.m. in Madison
- December 28 from 1:30 to 3:00 p.m. at Jasper High School’s Auditorium (1600 St. Charles St. in Jasper)
- December 29 from 1:00 to 2:30 p.m. at Greencastle Senior High School’s McNally Center Auditorium (910 E. Washington St. in Greencastle)
IDOE will post final meeting details on our website as soon as possible. As always, you may contact my office with further questions or concerns at fastforward@doe.in.gov.

Executive Summary of Indiana’s Fast Forward Plan

Standards and Assessments:

Through RttT, ED asks states to advance reforms by adopting standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace and to compete in the global economy. As part of the application, ED requires states to demonstrate commitment to adopting a common set of high-quality standards. States can demonstrate this commitment by highlighting participation in a consortium of a significant number of states working toward developing and adopting a common set of K-12 standards. These standards are supported by evidence indicating they are internationally benchmarked and build toward college and career readiness by the time of high school graduation. Further, ED requires states to commit to adopting these standards by August 2, 2010 (or at a minimum, by a later date in 2010 specified by the state) and implementing the standards thereafter in a well-planned way.

To that end, Indiana joined the Common Core State Standards Initiative, a joint effort led by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers in partnership with Achieve, ACT and the College Board. By joining this consortium, governors and state commissioners of education from across the country have demonstrated their commitment to a state-led process to develop a common core of state standards in English/language arts and mathematics for grades K-12. To date, 51 states and territories have joined this consortium.

The draft K-12 standards are expected to be released by early 2010. An expert validation committee will provide an independent review of the common core state standards as well as the grade-by-grade standards. States and national organizations will have the opportunity to review and provide evidence-based feedback on the draft documents throughout the process. Public feedback on the K-12 standards will be captured at www.corestandards.org. IDOE will work with the Indiana Education Roundtable and the State Board of Education to adopt the new standards in 2010.

RttT also requires states to highlight participation in a consortium of a significant number of states that is working toward developing and implementing common, high-quality assessments aligned with the common set of K-12 standards. As a natural progression of the Common Core State Standards Initiative’s work, some states will voluntarily come together to develop new, innovative, common assessments as part of RttT. Indiana is taking a leading role in a consortium of states working toward developing and implementing common, high-quality assessments aligned with common standards. This common assessment system will include multiple forms of assessment so student performance will be determined by what each student knows and can do.
Finally, ED requires states to collaborate with participating LEAs to develop a high-quality plan for supporting a statewide transition to and implementation of internationally-benchmarked K-12 standards that build toward college and career readiness by the time of high school graduation and high-quality assessments tied to these standards. Where appropriate, Indiana will invite consortium, LEA, teacher and teachers’ association participation in the rollout effort. Fast Forward may include, but will not be limited to, the following:

- Collaborative effort between IDOE, Indiana teachers and college/university partners to conduct a gap analysis to determine the difference between current Indiana standards and the new common standards;
- Realignment of the ISTEP+ blueprint to the common standards and improvement of Indiana’s diagnostic assessments so they are predictive of common core;
- Development of a research-based scope and sequence, for each subject area and grade level, in alignment with the common standards and ISTEP+;
- Development of curriculum maps in alignment with scope and sequence, new standards and ISTEP+;
- Development and delivery of comprehensive and ongoing professional development via convenient technological means in order to provide optimal support to teachers and administrators;
- Evaluation of the effectiveness of professional development to ensure Indiana’s teachers are receiving the information and support they need to close the achievement gap and be successful in the classroom;
- Development of all appropriate materials around the common standards, including written guides (distributed digitally) to help teachers better understand the new standards and what each standard means in terms of actual practice at particular grade levels; and
- Monitoring of the progress of implementation in order to provide quality feedback and support to LEAs and teachers throughout the implementation process.

Data Systems to Support Instruction:

Indiana must fulfill one reform condition in the area of data systems. We must demonstrate that the state has a complete statewide longitudinal data system, according to the twelve elements laid out in the America COMPETES Act (the elements are based on the Data Quality Campaign elements). Each element, along with its implementation status, is identified below:

1) A unique statewide identifier: 100% complete.
2) Student-level enrollment, demographic, and program participation: 100% complete.
3) Student-level information about the points at which students exit, transfer in/out, or complete P-16 education programs: 100% complete.
4) Capacity to communicate with higher education data systems: 100% capacity is present; data sharing is approximately 50% complete.

5) A data audit system assessing data quality, validity and reliability: 100% complete.

6) Yearly test records of individual students: 100% complete

7) Information on students not tested by grade and subject: 100% complete.

8) A teacher identifier system with the ability to match teachers to students: 50% complete. IDOE has a teacher identifier system (School Personnel Number, SPN) and will collect course completion data tied to teachers (using the SPN) beginning at the end of the 2009-2010 school year. The SPN also allows IDOE to tie each teacher to the following information: institution at which they received their education; licensure and certification; demographic variables such as race/ethnicity, age, and gender; and staff position information such as school assignment, subjects and grade levels taught, and years of experience.

9) Student-level transcript information, including information on courses completed and grades earned: 0% complete. In order to complete this element, Indiana has applied for a federal State Longitudinal Data Systems (SLDS) grant. This grant would provide the resources the state needs to complete our statewide e-transcript initiative.

10) Student-level college readiness test scores: 100% complete.

11) Information regarding the extent to which students transition successfully from secondary schools to post-secondary education, including whether students enroll in remedial coursework: 50% complete. As noted in element four, IDOE is piloting matching with the Indiana Commission for Higher Education (CHE) to track K-12 students into college. At present, IDOE has done that matching with a small subset of students. Projects proposed in the state’s recent SLDS grant are designed to move the IDOE-CHE matching project forward to be able to answer questions about student success in post-secondary education.

12) Other information determined necessary to address alignment and adequate preparation for success in post-secondary education: 50% complete. IDOE is an agency participant in the Indiana Workforce and Education Data System (IWIS) project, which is designed as a repository for matched P-20 data, allowing for reports and other tools to answer key policy questions. IWIS was initially created by the state’s Department of Workforce Development (DWD) to house its data and transitioned to work with CHE to match higher education data. The data matching between DWD and CHE has allowed the creation of several custom reports which have provided CHE with some early insight into the performance of its higher education students in the workforce. IDOE has also completed data matching with DWD, using adult secondary education data. Next, IDOE will share career and technical education information with DWD, allowing for matches with workforce data as well as higher education data already present in the system. The final goal is to identify the best practice for matching IDOE K-12 data with higher education and workforce data. IDOE and CHE will pilot a match of the 08-09 higher education data with K-12 data at the end of 2009. IDOE, DWD, and CHE are also examining additional best practices for matching on a variety of variables to link K-12 and workforce data.
Beyond simply having a strong statewide longitudinal data system, Indiana will demonstrate that the data it produces is accessible to and usable by teachers, school and district administrators, policymakers, students, parents and community members. All these stakeholders should be able to use data to inform their instruction, operations, management, resource allocation and decision- and policy-making.

To achieve these goals, Indiana will invest in a vertically operable data system, allowing IDOE to obtain rapid-time data, which would be available quickly enough to inform current lessons, instruction and related supports by communicating with local student management systems. Student achievement data, including data from ISTEP+ and various formative assessments such as DIBELS and Acuity, will be made available to educators, parents, decision-makers and other stakeholders through the state’s Learning Connection portal. Indiana has identified the following objectives to achieve this goal:

**Objective 1:** The Learning Connection is expanded to include electronic student-level IEP data.

**Objective 2:** Working with stakeholders, additional data sets are identified to load into the Learning Connection from IDOE’s data warehouse; data are loaded and desired reports to be created and displayed using the data are also identified and provided.

**Objective 3:** The functionality of the Learning Connection is expanded to allow districts to upload district-level assessment data.

**Objective 4:** Indiana’s at-risk indicator tool is enhanced to utilize additional longitudinal data available in the Learning Connection and provide educators with a customized, secure and accurate student-level at-risk report.

**Objective 5:** Data analysis tools and additional custom reports are built into the Learning Connection to facilitate data analysis by educators.

**Objective 6:** Targeted professional development and evaluation is provided to selected schools (as well as statewide).

**Objective 7:** Post-secondary feedback data at the individual student and aggregated level are available in the Learning Connection, for educators (student-level) and the public (aggregated level).

**Objective 8:** IDOE’s public website is revamped to include data definitions, more frequently updated data, additional report querying tools and aggregated postsecondary feedback reports.

In addition to making data easily accessible to educators and the public, Indiana will encourage educators to use this data to improve instruction and close the achievement gap. Indiana wants to increase the use of local instructional improvement systems that provide educators with the information and resources they need to inform and improve their instruction. If Indiana is awarded RttT funding, IDOE will not only continue toward the current goal of 100% adoption of diagnostic assessment tools statewide, but IDOE will also work with existing partners to develop the next generation of assessment technology. The evolved system will identify existing gaps in student knowledge to ensure appropriate instruction, ensure that a student does not fall further behind, and identify the most critical interventions. IDOE would also seek to expand adoption to the high school level. RttT funds will help Indiana accelerate the adoption of an evolved assessment system by allowing IDOE to work with schools that are using diagnostic assessments well and to full capacity now to develop the enhanced tools while the original system continues to be adopted by remaining schools statewide.
Once new functions are fully developed, each school can simply “press a button” to update its systems with the new offerings.

The state will also support participating LEAs that are using instructional improvement systems by providing effective professional development on how to use these systems. To do this, Indiana will provide expert technical assistance to help individual educators understand the data made available through the Learning Connection and to help strategize ways the data may inform instruction for a given educator/student. IDOE also plans to use the data warehouse to further provide student-level longitudinal data to teachers and administrators using the Learning Connection.

Moreover, IDOE plans to provide professional development and job-embedded training for educators on how to analyze data and use it for benchmarking and evaluation, as well as differentiating and improving instruction to benefit student learning. Professional development will be provided in two ways. First, statewide—Web-Ex trainings, videos, and conferences will be offered on how to use Learning Connection data and reporting tools for data-driven instruction. Second, targeted professional development will be offered to Indiana’s identified lowest-achieving schools with the goal of raising student achievement quickly and significantly.

IDOE also plans to continually obtain feedback from educators, policymakers and researchers to ensure reports made available through the data warehouse and Learning Connection are sufficient to meet stakeholder needs. In addition, IDOE will evaluate the effectiveness of its professional development to ensure it leads to measurable increases in data-driven instruction and data-driven policy-making, resulting in increased student achievement and school attainment while closing the achievement gap.

IDOE also envisions creating a certification training process, much like Oregon’s DATA project. This certification program, according to Oregon DATA Project’s website, “was created for educators interested in teaching others how to use data to improve student achievement.” IDOE would like to pursue a similar train-the-trainer model to scale effective professional development statewide.

To make more and better data available to educators in a mechanism that promotes data-powered instruction, diploma auditing and feedback to counselors and teachers, IDOE needs to expand its Learning Connection project to enter Phase Two. This phase will provide additional custom reporting and high school feedback reports and will promote professional development partnerships between researchers and educators. Moreover, IDOE will revamp its public website to make aggregated data more user-friendly and more up to date by utilizing data obtained through real-time data exchange and adding postsecondary feedback data.

The state will also make appropriate data from instructional improvement systems, together with statewide longitudinal data system data, available and accessible to researchers.

**Great Teachers and Leaders:**

First and foremost, IDOE’s priority with regard to RttT is to recognize great teaching and leadership. The best thing we can do in our application is shine a spotlight on excellence by assisting schools and LEAs in their efforts to increase teacher and leader effectiveness, close the achievement gap and ensure the equitable distribution of effective teachers and leaders across the state. Nowhere is this task more urgent and important than in high-poverty and high-minority schools that have been historically marginalized. Addressing this inequity and eliminating the achievement gap are the civil rights issues of our time.
To meet this objective, IDOE will focus on teacher and principal quality through the accurate evaluation of individual performance. Recognizing that teacher and principal effectiveness are the most important factors in improving student achievement and closing the achievement gap, teachers and principals must be credibly evaluated on their ability to impact student outcomes and growth. As prescribed by the RttT requirements established by ED, participating LEAs must reexamine their evaluation tools and begin to use them to inform policies regarding hiring, laying off, professional development, compensation, promotion and retention.

Evidence of student learning must be a significant criterion for teacher or leader effectiveness. This criterion is clearly outlined by ED and must be a key to consideration for teacher and principal evaluation. IDOE will work with teachers and principals to develop a common framework. This framework will incorporate student growth, as defined by the RttT application, to count for at least 51% of the total evaluation. Student growth will be the foundation upon which a clear set of guidelines is identified by IDOE for evaluating teacher and principal performance.

There are several key goals behind the development of a common evaluation framework for both teachers and leaders:

- Establishment of a program to evaluate and reward effective teachers and school leaders through a comprehensive data-driven performance management system;

- Enhancement of strategies which recruit, develop, reward, and retain effective teachers and principals, especially where they are needed most;

- Development of a statewide talent pipeline to increase the number of and broaden the distribution of highly effective teachers and leaders, particularly in high-poverty and high-minority schools;

- Creation of clear, rigorous standards and high expectations for teacher and leader performance; and

- Alignment between teacher evaluation and principal evaluation, with an intense focus on data.

The teacher evaluation framework will include close examination of key performance metrics (e.g. purposeful planning, classroom culture, effective instructional techniques, and professional leadership). Coupled with student growth and learning, these metrics will provide for data that meaningfully differentiates teacher effectiveness across a four category ratings spectrum (highly effective, effective, needs improvement, ineffective). Having four clearly defined categories is essential in ensuring that (1) great teachers are recognized and rewarded for their efforts, (2) great teaching practice is shared across the state and (3) decision-making regarding teachers is carried out in a fair and transparent way.

Similarly, principals will be evaluated in accordance with an evidence-based, multi-pronged definition of effectiveness. Based on the work of New Leaders for New Schools, Indiana’s principal evaluation framework will closely examine (1) student outcomes, (2) teacher effectiveness and (3) leadership actions. Within these three domains, the principal evaluation will determine whether and how the school leader is able to help teachers improve and ensure effective teaching in every classroom (e.g. hiring, professional development, accountability, etc.). This will require a streamlined analysis of leadership practices that have high causality with regard to breakthrough achievement gains. Both the teacher and principal evaluation framework will include a collaborative goal-setting component for teachers and principals to set growth goals specific to student achievement and teacher or principal effectiveness.
As part of the evaluation process, teachers and principals will be provided a dashboard that clearly illustrates student growth data in which individual student growth can be analyzed against classroom growth, classroom growth against school-wide growth, school-wide growth against district growth, and district growth against state growth. This data dashboard will also be used to shape targeted growth plans for teachers and principals, outlining key strengths, areas for improvement, and next steps for professional development.

Indiana is uniquely positioned to use student growth as a predominant criterion for teacher and principal evaluation because we are one of only a few states that currently have a clear approach to measuring student growth at the individual student level. Indiana began exploring student growth models in spring 2008 and is in the midst of a three-phase rollout process to be completed next fall.

Developed in partnership with the National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment (NCIEA) and the Colorado Department of Education, Indiana’s growth model will provide a common understanding of how individual students and groups of students progress from year to year toward state standards based on where each individual student begins. Moreover, the model will focus attention on which teachers and principals are getting the strongest growth. Notably, a teacher’s evaluation would be predominantly based on the performance of all his/her students over time.

This evaluation framework will lead to the development of systems to distinguish highly effective teaching and leadership from effective, effective from fair, and fair from poor. To ensure these systems are used to inform decision-making in a meaningful way, teachers and principals will be involved in their development. This includes piloting these systems, especially in persistently low-achieving schools identified for state sanctions. The urgency with regard to ensuring that struggling schools have highly effective teachers and leaders cannot be overstated. This need was clearly evidenced by the recent audit of 23 schools currently in the fourth consecutive year of state sanctions under Public Law 221.

Along with the adoption of a common teacher and principal evaluation framework, classroom observations will be carried out multiple times throughout each school year, and full evaluations will be completed at least annually. Increasing the frequency of constructive feedback and support will lead to better information about instructional quality and the caliber of school leadership. IDOE will also use all available resources to ensure teachers and principals are held accountable for their effectiveness and performance.

As Indiana moves to a common evaluation framework for teachers and leaders, the state will need to redefine professional development as that which improves student growth and helps teachers score higher on the four category ratings spectrum. To this end, significant aspects of professional development will be put out to bid to ensure the highest quality and to hold prospective vendors accountable for the professional growth of all participants. IDOE will convene a committee to conduct this process and promote cutting-edge systems for compensating, promoting and retaining great teachers and leaders.

In addition to using student growth to evaluate teachers and principals, IDOE is a strong proponent of using student growth and performance to evaluate the institutions that train teachers and principals. In collaboration with state institutions of higher education, the state’s evaluation framework will be taught in teacher and principal preparation programs. These programs will be held accountable for producing effective teachers and leaders. Modeled after Louisiana’s initiative, Indiana plans to tie student growth data into a chain of evaluation that reaches all the way to teacher colleges. Those with a pattern of weak performance would face shake-ups or, in extreme cases, more severe sanctions.

Indiana also seeks to immediately increase the number of candidates participating in programs that have a track record of providing effective teachers: Teach For America, The New Teacher Project’s Indianapolis
Teaching Fellows and the Woodrow Wilson Indiana Teaching Fellows. Investing in alternative routes such as these ensures a pipeline of exceptional human capital and helps to address key areas of shortage across the state. Moreover, IDOE will lend strong support to induction programs that train, support and retain new teachers, measurably improve teacher effectiveness, and result in significant student achievement gains.

The evaluation framework will result in systems that provide clear feedback on performance to teachers and principals. Administrators and teacher leaders will be certified as evaluation experts after completing a rigorous training program and measurably demonstrating proficiency. The state will maintain a database of these experts and will track their record and results. IDOE will also call upon a “cabinet” of top teachers and leaders to help shape the future of teacher and leader evaluation. Specifically, this would include continuous refinement of the evaluation framework with the goal of having an exemplar for the state and the rest of the nation.

Setting a measurable hurdle for teacher and principal effectiveness also provides the opportunity to identify and certify turnaround specialists. Nearly 100 Indiana schools, representing 50,000 students, will be in Restructuring by 2010. Turning around these largely high-poverty schools will directly and dramatically reduce the achievement gap. To meet this challenge, we will need great teachers and leaders willing to work in failing schools and drastically improve instructional quality. These teachers and leaders must be agents of change: well prepared and committed to an unyielding belief and sense of urgency to ensure that children in even the most depressed communities can achieve at the highest levels. IDOE will offer financial incentives for top-performing teachers and leaders to work in our state’s persistently lowest-achieving schools and ensure poor and minority students have equitable access to effective teachers and leaders.

A credible evaluation framework paves the path for strengthening the teaching profession, because it offers greater opportunity and flexibility for IDOE to support teacher and principal improvement. Teachers and principals are accountable to students and parents for employing high expectations and world-class standards to drive student achievement each day. These professionals should be evaluated annually and rewarded for their performance based on objective data on student learning. Through RttT, Indiana will become the best state in the union in establishing a positive culture where professional support, cultivation and training are second to none.

**Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools:**

As a cornerstone of the state’s reform efforts, Indiana plans to meet the challenge of diagnosing failing schools by developing a transparent system to identify and differentiate among the state’s persistent low-achievers. This means looking at two key indicators of school performance: student achievement and student growth. Notably, Indiana is one of only a handful of states prepared to implement a value-added assessment as part of a comprehensive strategy for responding to the needs of the state’s lowest-achieving schools.

There is a profound urgency to attack this particular reform area. Intervening in the lowest-achieving schools may be the most important task IDOE will assume over the next several years. The numbers here are stark. Nearly 100 Indiana schools, representing 50,000 students, will be in Restructuring by 2010. IDOE will install and enforce strong and clear processes for sanctioned interventions, including the identification of the appropriate turnaround model for each situation.

Although Indiana has made bold strides in finding ways to improve our state’s lowest-achieving schools, significantly more remains to be done. IDOE is committed to helping those LEAs and schools desiring to create
fundamental change in and depart from business as usual with its struggling schools. Current efforts include the following:

- Technical assistance for struggling schools to undertake comprehensive improvement planning;
- Extensive state planning around a comprehensive turnaround approach, providing charter-like freedom to all participating schools;
- Acceleration of the state’s school accountability timeline, with the goal of allowing the state to provide resources earlier to help the lowest-achieving schools; and
- Issuance of a Request for Information for a “Turnaround Leaders Academy,” aiming to work with strong external partners to develop a pipeline for “transformational leadership.”

IDOE has the statutory right to intervene in chronically failing schools. This is largely uncharted territory for Indiana and will require new infrastructure, systems, funding and external partners to intervene effectively. Twenty-three schools will be eligible for takeover in 2011 under state statute, and many more schools may fall into this category in future years. IDOE is preparing a strategy for these schools if and when it becomes necessary for these schools to come under state receivership.

Before it becomes necessary to take such a drastic step, however, IDOE will assist LEAs in providing course correction and guidance. In 2009, the state funded Technical Assistance Teams (TAT) to visit the 23 schools identified for state sanctions and provide targeted feedback embedded within a comprehensive improvement planning process. Following these visits, each school will have the opportunity to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the state that will outline the actions needed for the school to remain in good standing with IDOE. The MOU process ensures that key decision makers are involved and that schools understand (1) the steps that must be taken to avoid takeover and (2) the urgency of engendering rapid improvement. If these actions and the ensuing results are successful, the school will continue to operate with its current governance structure. But if these actions are not taken and the results continue to be poor, the state will pursue the most aggressive action possible to ensure that every student has access to a high quality education.

Indiana will align its turnaround strategy with those of ED, consistent with the requirements of both RttT and 1003(g) School Improvement Grants (SIG). The four intervention models are summarized below:

- **Turnaround model**: Replace the principal, rehire no more than 50% of the staff, and grant the principal sufficient operational flexibility (including flexibility in staffing, calendars/time, and budgeting) to implement fully a comprehensive approach to substantially improve student outcomes.

- **Restart model**: Convert a school or close and reopen it under a charter school operator, a charter management organization, or an education management organization that has been selected through a rigorous review process.

- **School closure**: Close a school and enroll the students who attended that school in other, higher-achieving, schools in the LEA.

- **Transformation model**: Implement each of the following strategies: (1) replace the principal and take steps to increase teacher and school leader effectiveness; (2) institute comprehensive instructional
reforms; (3) increase learning time and create community-oriented schools; and (4) provide operational flexibility and sustained support.

All Title I, SIG, and RttT funding will be aligned with ED turnaround models. Moreover, we are excited that new and innovative solutions like New Tech High School could be incorporated within these four models to support the development of rigorous and collaborative learning environments. IDEO will work with LEAs to implement the model that best applies to the specific needs of each school. We will intensely focus on the use of data, especially data collected by the TAT teams during the quality school reviews, in turning around these schools and closing the achievement gap. As part of the MOU process, IDEO will also work with schools to outline key metrics for judging and evaluating performance. Ongoing monitoring and assistance in local school improvement efforts will be provided to ensure that schools are on a clear path to success and are able to sustain their progress.

A goal with school turnaround is to provide schools the autonomy to control the necessary levers for transformative change – the greatest of which are teachers and leaders. IDEO is committed to developing robust human capital pipelines that identify and attract new and existing teachers and leaders to turnaround schools. Indiana is currently in the process of establishing multiple pathways for prospective turnaround leaders:

- **Indiana University Executive MBA for Turnaround Leadership:** A unique partnership between the Kelley School of Business, Indiana University Graduate School of Education, Teach For America, and IDEO to establish a pathway to school leadership.

- **Indianapolis Principals Fellowship:** A collaboration of Columbia Teachers College, Teach For America, and Indianapolis Public Schools to provide a fast-track path to school leadership within IPS.

- **Notre Dame Educational Leadership Program:** Supported by The Kern Family Foundation, an innovative approach to transformative education leadership that seeks to attract entrepreneurial individuals to redefine what is possible in a public school setting.

- **Turnaround Leaders Academy:** U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan stated, “Over the coming years, America needs to find 5,000 high-energy, hero principals to take over struggling schools.” In response to his challenge, the Turnaround Leaders Academy will identify, recruit, train and develop transformational leaders who will focus on the challenge of turning around our state’s chronically low-achieving schools.

A strong system of high quality charter schools is another tool for Indiana as we look to turn around the lowest 5% of schools. Indiana does not have a charter school cap, and its current charter community is largely located near Indiana’s lowest-achieving schools. Ball State University, the City of Indianapolis and any local school corporation can authorize charters. Although charter schools are an important component of school turnaround, Indiana must ensure that only quality providers are approved and that low-performing charters are either improved or closed. The state will focus on creating an environment that is supportive of charter development and increasing the number of charter authorizers while holding them to a high standard of quality and service.

IDEO recognizes there are schools in low-income areas across the state that are beating the odds when it comes to positively affecting the life outcomes of high-poverty and high-minority students. As part of the state’s turnaround strategy, we will shine a spotlight on high-performing high-poverty (HPHP) schools. By linking struggling schools to exemplars, we can begin to stimulate significant improvement and build a network
of resources that does not require direct state involvement. The full implementation of Indiana’s growth model will help to identify these HPH schools. In this sense, the state’s turnaround approach will be used as an R&D engine to develop and implement best-in-class policies, raising student achievement and eliminating the achievement gap so all Hoosiers graduate from high school ready for college and career success.

Conclusion:

Among other things, Fast Forward includes (a) the expansion of programs with a proven track record of bringing exceptional human capital into the ranks of the teaching and school leader professions; (b) support for a statewide system linking readily-accessible data, relating to both students and their teachers, across the continuum; (c) deployment of a new tool to measure student growth over time, which will provide teachers with an invaluable view of the students in their classrooms and state administrators with a more reliable measure by which to hold schools accountable; and (d) increased funding for educational entrepreneurship.

RttT funding will be provided to those states which most aggressively advance reforms. Indiana’s Race to the Top application sets the stage for bold and innovative initiatives that will dramatically close the achievement gap and have a lasting impact well beyond the life of the one-time RttT funds. Working collaboratively with schools and LEAs, IDOE will move swiftly and deliberately in pursuit of our vision for academic achievement and global competitiveness, encouraging fresh new ideas and out-of-the-box thinking. Innovation and urgency will provide the fuel for Indiana’s reform efforts and closing the achievement gap.