

NEWS

from the

Louisiana Federation of Teachers

Steve Monaghan, President

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LFT to be “fully engaged” in Race to the Top

Union will demand accountability and inclusion as school boards decide on using funds

(Baton Rouge – December 21, 2009) The state’s largest teacher union intends to be fully engaged in how a new federal education program’s funds will be used in Louisiana’s classrooms, Louisiana Federation of Teachers President Steve Monaghan said today.

“Too many Louisiana children are too poor with needs too great to walk away from a share of the \$4.4 billion Race to the Top funds,” Monaghan said.

“What brought LFT to the table is our belief that engagement is far better than disengagement and that dialogue is better than silence,” said Monaghan. “What kept us at the table and engaged in the discussions was willingness of all parties to entertain every part of the proposal as *organic*. That means we can try properly resourced reforms, and if they don’t work, we can modify them, and even change directions if necessary. Our conversations centered on the possibilities and not on any entrenched position.

“To be very frank, we do not necessarily agree with all the ideas and policies in the proposal,” Monaghan said. “But we do agree that all children and all teachers deserve much better and much more than they’re receiving now. We understand that there remain details to be resolved and unknowns to be discovered. The LFT intends to act as a partner as long as we are treated as such.”

Because so many of Race to the Top’s details must be worked out at the school board level, Monaghan said, the Federation’s local leaders expect to be heavily involved.

“Our local chapters and our members will demand accountability and inclusion as school boards decide whether to participate and how they will implement the Louisiana Education Reform Plan,” he said.

Although a limited number of schools in participating districts may be involved at first, Monaghan said, what begins in those schools could become the model for all of public education in the future. It is critical for teachers and their unions to engage these reforms.

“We will form assessment teams in our local chapters,” Monaghan said. “These informed experts will offer guidance as programs are developed, and will monitor the programs as they are implemented.

“We expect to be fully engaged at all levels,” he continued, “and we will always be mindful that our goal is the education of children.”

“If the R2T initiatives work,” he said, “we want to know so we can inform decision makers, the education community and the general public. If they don’t work, we want to know for the same reasons. A debate now rages concerning many of these reforms, and we must take part in that debate.”

Monaghan said that the hours spent with Superintendent Pastorek and his team often included very spirited debate and earnest disagreement. “But the discussions were good and they were long overdue,” he said.

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The Federation recommended numerous modifications to various drafts of the proposal, Monaghan said. “While some of our ideas were not accepted, the current draft does contain a fair number of our recommendations.”

An example of a key Federation that is now a part of the proposal is the “learning environment index that identifies obstacles/impediments to achievement...”

The Learning Environment Index is a priority of the LFT. It means that conditions which may not be under the teacher’s direct control must be included in the observation. Those issues can range from the physical condition of the school to discipline issues, to adequacy of resources such as textbooks and educational materials.

“Ultimately the success or failure of this effort depends on continuing the honest dialogue that began with the R2T proposal,” said Monaghan. “R2T has already proven successful in spurring important discussions. To be successful in the schools, those discussions will have to continue with even greater inclusiveness.”