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State Schools Chief Jack O'Connell Urges Governor to Sign Measure to Help California Qualify for Federal Race to the Top Funding

SACRAMENTO – State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell today urged Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger to sign Senate Bill (SB) 19 that would improve the use of data to help students succeed, and remove a barrier to California's eligibility for "Race to the Top" funding under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009.

"The Race to the Top competition represents an opportunity to usher in a period of bold and far-reaching structural reform of our nation's K-12 public education system," said O'Connell. "As President Barack Obama and U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan have said, education data when used effectively, is a critical tool educators must employ to improve student achievement and close the achievement gap. The Race to the Top competition encourages states to improve the use of data to help students succeed. SB 19 removes any doubt that California is committed to using data to improve instruction and teacher effectiveness. I thank Senator Joe Simitian for his ongoing leadership on this important education reform, and I also applaud Governor Schwarzenegger for leading the charge on this important policy change. I urge the Governor to sign this measure as soon as it reaches his desk."

O'Connell sponsored SB 19, which is authored by state Senator Joe Simitian (D-Palo Alto). The measure deletes existing language in state law that prevents the state from using pupil data in teacher assignment and evaluation. Nothing in current law bars local educational agencies from doing so. **In fact, President Obama cited the Long Beach Unified School District as an example of a district that effectively uses student and teacher data in their instructional decision-making processes.** O'Connell has urged other districts in California to follow suit. However, O'Connell agrees that any real or perceived barriers to use data to improve instruction and teacher effectiveness should be eliminated.

Race to the Top is part of ARRA that was signed into law in February by

President Obama. The entire spending and tax package to benefit the nation's schools includes more than \$100 billion for elementary, secondary, and postsecondary education. California already is eligible for \$8 billion in ARRA funding to benefit public education in grades K-12 throughout the state.

Race to the Top is the largest amount of money the federal government has ever offered specifically geared toward education reform. The funding is specifically intended for states to use in order to make systemic changes at the state level that would improve teaching and learning statewide. Education Secretary Duncan has articulated four components of the Race to the Top competition and is asking states to present plans that incorporate:

1. Adopting common core national standards and assessments to prepare students for success in college and the workplace;
2. Using data effectively in our schools to improve student achievement;
3. Turning around low-performing schools; and
4. Improving teacher effectiveness.

“I am working with the Governor, State Board of Education, Legislature, and leaders in the education field to develop an application for California that will allow us to make significant progress in each of these key policy areas,” added O’Connell.

“Considering we are in the midst of a worldwide economic downturn and face continued state budget turmoil, we cannot afford to miss applying for this generous funding opportunity because the stakes are too great, the challenges are too steep, and this is the chance of a lifetime to make bold changes that will benefit all students in California.”

For more information on ARRA and its impact on public education in California, please visit <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ar/>.

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The California Department of Education is a state agency led by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O’Connell. The core purpose of CDE is to lead and support the continuous improvement of student achievement, with a specific focus on closing achievement gaps. For more information, please visit <http://www.cde.ca.gov> or by mobile device at <http://m.cde.ca.gov/>. You may also follow Superintendent O’Connell (@SSPIJack) on Twitter at <http://www.twitter.com/sspijack>.