Written by Andrew Mason
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CHICAGO – January 15, 2010. Governor Pat Quinn today signed into law the Performance Evaluation Reform Act of 2010, a bill to implement new, rigorous evaluations for teachers and school principals across the state. The new law boosts Illinois' "Race to the Top" application by addressing one of the four priority areas outlined by the U.S. Department of Education.

"This law is another strong signal to Washington that a top-notch education for all Illinois students is our foremost priority," said Governor Quinn. "Rigorous teacher and principal evaluations will make our education system the best it can be, while ensuring Illinois is at the head of the class when it comes to winning those important federal 'Race to the Top' funds."

Senate Bill 315, sponsored by Sen. Kimberly Lightford (D-Maywood) and Rep. Linda Chapa LaVia (D-Aurora), requires every school district to incorporate student performance as a significant factor in teacher and principal evaluations. The new law requires districts to work with its local teachers' union to meet the new requirements.

More than 350 school districts, representing more than 70 percent of Illinois' students, have agreed to make student performance at least 50 percent of evaluation criteria if Illinois receives "Race to the Top" funds.

Under the legislation, Chicago Public Schools and dozens of other districts will begin using the new teacher evaluations in 2012, with full statewide implementation by 2016. All districts will implement the new principal evaluations in 2012. If the state wins "Race to the Top funds," the timeline would be greatly accelerated with most districts implementing the evaluations in 2012.

Governor Quinn also signed Senate Bill 616, sponsored by Sen. James Meeks (D-Chicago) and Rep. Linda Chapa LaVia (D-Aurora), which allows non-profit organizations, such as Teach for America, to offer alternative certification programs independent from institutions of higher education. This allows the state to increase the number of high-quality training programs for teachers and principals, a priority established by the U.S. Department of Education. The non-profit programs will be required to undergo the same rigorous approval process as higher education institutions.

These bills represent a four-month effort by the Governor's Office, the Illinois State Board of Education, the two major teachers' unions, civic and business leaders, advocates, management groups and legislators from both parties.

“Race to the Top” is a $4.35 billion competitive federal grant process focused on innovative approaches to education. Illinois could receive up to $500 million in discretionary funds made available through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). Applications are due January 19.

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