

Innovative Uses of Stimulus Money at the Local Level

In February, President Barack Obama signed into law the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), an economic recovery package totaling \$787 billion. Included in this behemoth law is more than \$100 billion for federal education funding, an investment that doubles the annual budget appropriated for the U.S. Department of Education. Perhaps more importantly, the inclusion of education funding in the economic recovery package is a strong recognition of the important part America's schools play in the economy—school districts are, after all, large employers. In exchange for this incredible investment in education funding, schools are being challenged to be good and innovative stewards of this money, providing principals with the perfect opportunity to influence the direction and use of these funds at the local level.

Like so many federal laws and regulations, the ARRA has created many more questions than it has answered, and we're still receiving guidance and recommendations from the U.S. Department of Education on how exactly these funds can be spent. Generally, schools are required to spend Title I and federal special education funds in the manner outlined in federal law (the Elementary and Secondary Education Act; and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, IDEA). However, schools will be able to apply to their states for certain waivers from current law. For example, schools could apply to have the supplemental education services and choice set-aside requirements under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act waived for the ARRA funds.

Many are skeptical of schools' ability to spend the ARRA money they will receive within two years while remaining within the confines of the law. The school budgeting process is predicated on holding onto federal dollars, drawing down the funds slowly and purposefully. Now, schools are being told to spend large pots of money in only two year's time. Critics in Washington, D.C., doubt this can happen and will be watching the uses of this money with rapt attention. The bottom line is this: Schools will need to spend this money quickly and innovatively.

Funding Included in ARRA

Specifically, ARRA includes \$13 billion for Title I and \$12.2 billion for IDEA, over two years. (Go to www.naesp.org/resources/1/Pdfs/2009/ARRA_Funding_Chart.pdf to review the NAESP chart highlighting all of the K-12 education funding in ARRA.) The funds that will be delivered to the states, known as the State Fiscal Stabilization Funds, also include more than \$39 billion for K-12 education that will be delivered to schools via the federal Title I and IDEA formulas. Also included in these funds is \$8.8 billion for public safety and other government services that may include K-12 and higher education modernization and repair. Additionally, states will receive \$4.35 billion for State Incentive Grants and \$5 billion for what Education Secretary Arne Duncan refers to as the "Race to the Top" funds.

The Principal's Role

The influx of Title I and IDEA funding provides the ideal opportunity for schools to increase the amount and quality of the profes-

sional development its educators are receiving; new opportunities to apply for competitive grants for innovation are meant to spur creativity at the school building level. *This is where principals can and must have the greatest influence.*

Don't hesitate to tell your superintendent what training you want or need to be the best instructional leader for your school. Emphasize the importance of ongoing professional development for you and your colleagues and mentoring for new principals. Additionally, use this as an opportunity to identify the training your teachers and support staff require to improve teaching and learning in their classrooms. Request guidance and training to further innovate the instruction going on in your building, and make requests for curricula and programs that were denied in the past because of budget constraints. This is the time to be assertive and creative in improving instruction in your building.

Many principals talk about the challenges they face in influencing the direction funds flow within their schools' district. Congress and the Department of Education are not interested in seeing schools hold onto the money coming from ARRA. They want and will require ARRA funds to be spent quickly. Your superintendents and administrative offices will need guidance on the best ways to spend these funds—be that resource for them. Help your school meet the challenge Congress and the Obama administration have set forth. ■