

Island teachers' group won't sign on for 'Race to the Top'

By Eileen M. Daly

Rhode Island's Phase II "Race to the Top" application has been submitted without the support of the Jamestown Teachers Association and its parent organization, the National Education Association of Rhode Island.

JTA Co-presidents Cynthia Cherney and Carolyn Petrocelli declined to be interviewed, but agreed to provide the following written statement, upon the condition that it be printed in its entirety:

"At this time, the Jamestown Teachers' Association has not signed on to RTTT.

We have been asked to sign a document that is not complete.

For instance: Rhode Island's RTTT proposal fails to define a process by which teachers will be evaluated; the I-Plan, which is the state's process for teacher certification, is being eliminated, yet no new system has been defined.

RTTT money does not replace funding for existing programs or close gaps in the Jamestown School budget, but is earmarked for new, additional programs and staff which must meet the requirements of RTTT. Once the RTTT grant money is depleted, the Jamestown taxpayers will be responsible for funding these supplementary programs.

With the state and RTTT promoting even more privately man-

aged charter schools, Jamestown will be negatively impacted as funds will be diverted to those students who attend and are transported to charter schools.

After attending and participating in numerous forums, symposiums and town hall meetings, our decision to not sign on to RTTT, at this time, has been based on careful consideration of the data presented and the discussions that followed."

Peter Gingras, one of several assistant executive directors at NEARI, compared being asked to sign on to the current RTTT application to being asked to "sign a mortgage without knowing what the consequences of that mortgage

would be."

Specifically, Gingras objected to a number of factors in association with the current Phase II application process, including the new, yet-to-be-developed teacher evaluation model, the emphasis on increased numbers of charter schools and the potential for school districts to be left footing the bill for programs and initiatives once the RTTT funds are depleted.

Gingras also expressed disappointment in what he termed R.I. Education Commissioner Deborah Gist's lack of reception to suggestions made by NEARI representatives. Gingras likewise alleged that Gist and the R.I. Dept.

of Education have perpetuated the erroneous belief that union support is a prerequisite for obtaining Race to the Top Funds when, in fact, it is not.

According to Gingras, a number of Phase I top finishers did not have widespread union support. Gingras acknowledged, however, that the top two Phase I winners, Tennessee and Delaware, did enjoy widespread union support.

Gingras also questioned why the Phase II application does not contain any specific method of teacher evaluation.

"They've known about this for a long time now, so why is it tak-

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