



ROBBINSDALE AREA SCHOOLS

American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA)

Question and Answer Guide to the Stimulus Funding

June 2009

Robbinsdale Area Schools is responding to the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) by developing a plan designed to improve academic achievement and to cultivate learning environments characterized by mutual respect and personal responsibility. This question and answer guide provides information about the purpose and goals for the education stimulus funding, the needs identified by Robbinsdale Area Schools that align to the federal ARRA goals and the district's plan to address these needs over the funding period.

What is the primary purpose for the ARRA stimulus funds?

The primary purpose for the ARRA stimulus funds is to jump-start school reform and improvement efforts, save and create jobs that will stimulate the economy, provide one-time resources to districts and lead to improved results for students.

What are the specific goals of ARRA?

Districts must use the stimulus funding to accomplish one or more of the four ARRA goals including:

1. Adopt rigorous college- and career-ready standards and high-quality assessments
2. Establish data systems and use data for improvement
3. Increase teacher effectiveness
4. Turn around the lowest-performing schools

What rules and regulations will guide spending decisions?

The provisions contained within Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) determine how the ARRA funds can be spent. The ARRA funds are tightly regulated under these two federal programs and the accountability attached to these funds includes oversight by the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE).

What local needs will drive the funding decisions?

Local school districts conduct a needs assessment before allocating their ARRA funds, the results of which inform the spending decisions. Robbinsdale Area Schools will allocate the stimulus dollars to address needs in three areas including:

1. Three of the district's 4 Title I schools are in the "needs improvement" phase of NCLB because they have not met their AYP goals for 2 consecutive years. These schools are Meadow Lake, Northport and Lakeview. It is worth noting that after 4 years of not making AYP the Title I schools face restructuring.
2. The district itself is in the needs improvement phase of NCLB because elementary, middle and high schools as a whole have not met their AYP goals for 2 consecutive years. If the district does not

meet AYP goals for a third year, it enters corrective action status with additional requirements and restrictions.

3. According to a recent report by MDE the district's secondary schools have been disproportionately suspending African American students who receive special education services when compared to White students receiving special education services.

How will Robbinsdale Area Schools address these needs?

Based on the needs assessment described above, a plan is under development that will accomplish the ARRA goals as well as Priority 1 and Priority 3 from the Strategic Plan:

Priority 1: Increase the capacity of all district K-12 schools to enrich and accelerate academic achievement. This means the district's plan for stimulus dollars will:

- a. Raise expectations and increase academic rigor for all students
- b. Monitor student growth and design educational plans to accelerate achievement.
- c. Reduce race-based and poverty-based achievement gaps.
- d. Increase the percentage of students prepared for post-secondary opportunities.

Priority 3: Cultivate learning environments characterized by mutual respect and personal responsibility.

This means the district's plan for stimulus dollars will also:

- a. Improve students' sense of belonging at school.
- b. Ensure a safe and orderly learning environment.
- c. Minimize classroom disruptions that interfere with learning.
- d. Encourage and help families partner with schools to ensure student success.

How will the district use the ARRA funds to address these needs?

While some questions remains on funding restrictions, in general, the district's emerging plan provides high-quality teacher professional development that is based on National Standards for Professional Development. High-quality professional development is recognized as the best way to build capacity within the system and thus allow for sustainability once the funding expires. The professional development standards include:

Sustained: Concentration on only a few substantive professional development efforts designed to improve teaching and learning across the entire school and over a longer time period.

Job-embedded: A portion of the professional development efforts occur during the school day.

Collaborative: Colleagues work together across the school on improving practice and the achievement of all students.

Data-driven: Disaggregated student data is used to identify priorities for improvement.

Equity: Individual, group and school results are used to monitor the relationship of attitude, background, culture and social class on teaching and learning.

Focused on student instructional needs: Efforts are concentrated on improving response to student instructional needs.

Robbinsdale Area Schools plans to hire up to 9 Instructional Coaches and up to 9 Behavior Intervention Coaches. The Instructional Coaches will be highly trained in Response to Intervention (RtI), a systematic approach to improving whole-school reading and/or mathematics instruction, and the coaching standards designed by reading and mathematics professional organizations. The Behavior Intervention Coaches will be highly trained in Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), a systematic approach to cultivating positive learning environments. All of the coaches will also be trained in the delivery of high-quality professional development. They will be working to establish more effective school-wide problem

solving systems for teaching and learning and for promoting positive learning environments. The coaches will not be providing direct service to students.

Job descriptions for the coaches will be developed shortly and the positions will be advertised and posted as soon as possible. School administration and staff will assist in the selection of the coaches.

The stimulus funds should allow the district to provide these coaching positions to the schools over a two-year period. The coaches will help the schools build capacity by improving the overall system to a point that, once the funding is gone, the schools will be able to sustain these improved systems without the presence of the coach.

It is hoped that the hiring process for the coaches can begin soon so that many of the highest quality probationary teachers that were recently displaced can return (observing all standard hiring practices) to work throughout the two-year period of stimulus funding.

Individuals with questions about ARRA funding or the district's emerging plan may contact:

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