American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009:
Using ARRA Funds to Drive School Reform and Improvement
April 24, 2009

Education funds provided through the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act* (*ARRA*) provide a unique opportunity to jump start school reform and improvement efforts while also saving and creating jobs and stimulating the economy. These one-time resources should be spent in ways most likely to lead to improved results for students, long-term gains in school and school system capacity, and increased productivity and effectiveness.

In America, all students should graduate from high school prepared for college and a career and have the opportunity to complete at least one year of postsecondary education. This means that we must dramatically improve student achievement and close the achievement gap. *ARRA* identifies four core reforms that will help the nation meet that goal: (1) adopting rigorous college- and career-ready standards and high-quality assessments; (2) establishing data systems and using data for improvement; (3) increasing teacher effectiveness and equitable distribution of effective teachers; and (4) turning around the lowest-performing schools.

ARRA provides billions of dollars to strengthen education through the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund (SFSF); Title I, Part A of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (*ESEA*); Part B of the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (*IDEA*); Pell Grants; Federal Work-Study; and other programs. It also provides support for adults with disabilities through the Vocational Rehabilitation State Grants program and the Independent Living programs authorized under the *Rehabilitation Act*.

This document includes framing questions for decision making and examples of potential uses of funds to improve educational outcomes from early learning through high school. It is intended to spark ideas about how districts and schools might use *ARRA* funds, particularly those available under the SFSF, Title I, and *IDEA* Part B programs. Districts generally have up to two years to obligate these funds. While many school districts may need to use a portion of their *ARRA* funds to save jobs, every district and school should be considering how to use these funds to improve student outcomes over the next two years and to advance reforms that will have even longer-term impact.

Framing Questions for Decision Making

In considering how to best spend *ARRA* funds, decision makers should consider whether they can answer "yes" to these five questions:

1. **Drive results for students?** Will the proposed use of funds drive improved results for students, including students in poverty, students with disabilities, and English language learners?

2. **Increase capacity?** Will the proposed use of funds increase educators' long-term capacity to improve results for students?

3. **Accelerate reform?** Will the proposed use of funds advance state, district, or school improvement plans and the reform goals encompassed in *ARRA*?

4. **Avoid the cliff and improve productivity?** Will the proposed use of funds avoid recurring costs that states, school systems, and schools are unprepared to assume when this funding ends? Given these economic times, will the proposed use serve as "bridge funding" to help transition to more effective and efficient approaches?

5. **Foster continuous improvement?** Will the proposed use of funds include approaches to measure and track implementation and results and create feedback loops to modify or discontinue strategies based on evidence?

Using short-term *ARRA* funds effectively will require new thinking and thoughtful conversations among state, district, and school leaders, as well as teachers, students, families, and communities. The first step is a careful examination of student achievement data to determine where to focus improvement efforts. To inform thoughtful planning, below are examples of potential uses of funds for early learning through high school. These examples are not intended to be a menu of options or a list of "silver bullets," but rather a starting point for consideration in light of local goals, data, and context. Ultimately, if educators and community leaders focus on a small number of related and reinforcing strategies and apply these substantial one-time resources consistent with their overall plan for increasing student achievement, they are more likely to improve results than with a diffuse or scattershot approach.

All the examples below may be supported using funds made available through the SFSF program. To the extent consistent with program requirements, districts, and schools may also use Title I and *IDEA* Part B funds to support these or similar strategies and are encouraged to do so. The Department will supplement these examples over time with ideas about best practices from schools throughout the nation. The Department will also provide specific guidance on uses of funds allowable under Title I, *IDEA* Part B, and other *ARRA* programs.

Uses of Funds: Examples for Consideration

These initial examples are organized into five categories that reflect the priorities of *ARRA*:

- Adopting rigorous college- and career-ready standards and high-quality assessments;
- Establishing data systems and using data for improvement;
- Increasing teacher effectiveness and equitable distribution of effective teachers;
- Turning around the lowest-performing schools; and
- Improving results for all students, including early learning, extended learning time, use of technology, preparation for college, and school modernization.

Adopting rigorous standards and high-quality assessments

World-class education systems are built upon college- and career-ready standards, rich and engaging curricula based on the standards, and high-quality, aligned assessments to measure student learning. While many states are actively revising their standards and assessments to increase rigor and improve alignment, districts and schools can concurrently take steps to promote rigorous standards, effective assessment systems, and strong curriculum. Some examples would be to:

- Increase student participation in rigorous advanced courses such as Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and dual enrollment in postsecondary credit-bearing courses and provide professional development for teachers and counselors to make the expansion possible.

- Develop or adopt formative and interim assessments that are valid and reliable for all students, especially students with disabilities and English language learners, and that provide timely data to help educators track and improve student progress. If assessments are technology based, train teachers in how to use this technology.

- Purchase or adapt a high-quality curriculum aligned with standards with embedded assessments. Include instructional materials appropriate for English language learners and students with disabilities. For two years of *ARRA* funding, intensively train all teachers in effectively using the curriculum with their students.

Establishing data systems and using data for improvement

At the heart of improving schools and school districts are systems to gather and analyze data and provide feedback to educators, students, families, and the community in order to improve student and teacher performance continuously. Examples of investments in data systems and effective use of data include efforts to:

- Develop or enhance existing data systems to provide teachers access to (1) student data in such areas as attendance, grades, course schedules, and disability or English language learner status, and (2) data that show academic performance and growth, how those compare to statewide averages for similar students and schools, and whether students are on track to meet standards and graduate from high school.

- Train principals, teachers, guidance counselors, and other staff to use data to identify the specific help students need to succeed, to adjust classroom instruction to better address student strengths and weaknesses, and to target professional development and other resources on student and teacher needs.

- Track the number and percentage of students by school who graduate high school and go on to complete at least one year's worth of college credit. Use the information to strengthen high school programs and increase the percentage of students going on to college.

- Link districts' multiple data systems (including student, financial, and personnel) and use resulting information for analyses and reports that enable community, district, and school leaders to better understand the educational and cost effectiveness of district programs and strategies and allocate resources accordingly.

- Launch an easy-to-use online Individualized Education Program (IEP) system for students with disabilities that is aligned with state academic standards and can be used by educators to create content-rich IEPs that are aligned with the general education curriculum.

Increasing teacher effectiveness and equitable distribution of effective teachers

Teacher effectiveness is a major influence on students' academic success. Districts and school leaders can improve teacher effectiveness and address inequitable teacher distribution through how they recruit, hire, induct, develop, evaluate, advance, and compensate teachers. Moreover, they can create the school conditions that foster teacher effectiveness and retention such as excellent school leadership, time for collaboration, and a culture of continuous improvement. Examples of strategies to improve teacher effectiveness and address inequitable distribution of highly qualified teachers between low- and high-poverty schools include to:

- Establish and implement a fair and reliable teacher evaluation system that provides ongoing feedback to teachers about their performance based on objective measures of student achievement outcomes and multiple classroom observations, that gives guidance for improving instructional practices, and that is used to inform teacher professional development and advancement.

- Attract effective teachers into high-poverty schools and hard-to-staff subject areas by restructuring personnel operations to increase the pool of high-quality applicants, make timely hiring decisions, place teachers appropriately, and provide feedback to teacher preparation programs on the success of their graduates. Fill shortage areas by supporting teachers in obtaining dual certification in special education or English language acquisition.

- Redesign teacher professional development and school schedules to ensure that teacher learning opportunities are sustained, job-embedded, collaborative, data-driven, and focused on student instructional needs. Help teachers master relevant content knowledge, especially for middle and high school teachers in hard-to-staff subject areas, such as math and science. Provide intense professional development over two years and

additional training to highly effective teachers who will be able to serve as expert instructional leaders and coaches in the future.

- Support new teachers in their first two years on the job through induction programs that include structured mentoring, teacher networks, and extensive professional development.

- Provide professional development for special education and general education teachers on evidence-based school-wide strategies in reading, math, writing, science, and other subject areas, and positive behavioral supports to improve outcomes for students with disabilities.

- Train school staff to partner with families to improve student learning, including helping staff clearly communicate about school programs and individual student progress and fostering involvement in school activities and decision making. Support home visits, family nights, and parent training that help families make informed decisions about their children's academic program, request needed services, assist with homework, and support learning in other ways.

- Upgrade school leader recruitment efforts and create a two-year program of professional development and coaching, with special attention to new principals, to increase principal effectiveness in raising school performance.

- Redesign teacher and principal compensation systems to reward factors related to contribution and effectiveness. Increase pay to attract and retain effective math and science teachers.

Turning around the lowest-performing schools

Turning around persistently low-performing schools is likely to require a significant overhaul of school staff, leadership, instructional program and calendar, and for the most distressed schools, school closing or consolidation. In the context of taking such forceful action, examples of strategies that can contribute to school improvement include to:

- Aggressively restructure or close a district's persistently lowest performing schools and reopen with new leadership and staff, a new research-based instructional model, longer school day and year, and intensive job-embedded professional development for teachers.

- Support community schools that offer art, reading clubs, and other academic enrichment while also engaging community, social service, and health organizations to better serve students and their families.

- Provide incentives, including bonuses, to teams of highly effective teachers and leaders to move to low-performing schools and to take on instructional leadership roles.

- Add time to the school day and year and redesign the school schedule to increase time for core academics, enrichment, and staff collaboration.

- Create 9th grade academies staffed with highly effective teachers to help students transition successfully to high school, and create summer programs that prepare struggling students to be successful in gateway courses, such as algebra, and in college-preparatory Advanced Placement classes.

- Launch a comprehensive literacy program. In an elementary school, purchase a new reading curriculum that focuses on improving students' oral language competence and academic vocabulary so as to improve comprehension and address the fourth-grade reading drop off. Provide an intensive two-year training program for all teachers and the principal. In a secondary school, train staff and purchase materials for a literacy program that identifies students' needs, supports literacy development across content areas, and provides interventions for struggling students.

- Create intensive summer institutes and ongoing support for teams of principals, teachers, and counselors from low-performing schools to analyze data and develop specific action plans for improving student results.

- Develop a data-driven approach to understanding school performance and the causes of low performance; closely monitoring results of restructured schools; providing results to school staff, families and communities; and then using this information to modify approaches and expand successful approaches.

Improving results for all students

In using ARRA funds, districts should also consider other strategies consistent with ARRA's reform goals and the evidence on improving student outcomes. These include: strengthening early learning; extending learning time; strengthening preparation for college and careers; using technology to improve teaching and learning; modernizing school facilities; and conducting reviews, demonstrations, and evaluations that enhance program effectiveness. Examples in these areas include efforts to:

- *Strengthen early learning.* Align a district preschool program with state early learning guidelines and K-3 standards and support credentialing and intensive training for staff working with high poverty children and families. Provide comprehensive screenings to identify at-risk children and connect with vision, health, and other services. Expand the availability and range of inclusive placement options for preschoolers with disabilities by developing the capacity of public and private preschool programs to serve these children.

If there is a plan for sustainability, expand high-quality preschool programs to provide access for larger numbers of young children.

- *Extend learning time for students.* Expand after-school and summer learning programs for two years in conjunction with existing community providers to provide more time for learning, including one-on-one and small group instruction, opportunities for service, internships, the arts, and other activities that both enrich the curriculum and address the specific needs of low-performing students.

- *Strengthen preparation for college and careers.* Offer dual enrollment courses and student internships and train school staff to help students understand college and career options, provide effective guidance, and create a college-going culture. For students with disabilities, employ transition coaches for two years to identify work-study, community service, internship, college, and career opportunities and to establish community partnerships that can endure after two years.

- *Use technology to improve teaching and learning.* Purchase and train teachers to use instructional software, technology-enabled white boards, and other interactive technologies that have been shown to be effective aids for instruction, particularly for English language learners, students with disabilities, and both struggling and advanced learners. Use open education resources or purchase high-quality online courseware in core high school content areas.

- *Modernize school facilities*. Modernize schools to be open to the community, accessible and energy efficient, and to have up-to-date science labs and technology that enhance learning. Include early learning facilities that are safe and appropriate for the youngest children.

- *Conduct reviews, demonstrations, and evaluations that enhance effectiveness*. Invest in studies and reviews that can strengthen programs over time. For example, assess the rigor of coursework in high-poverty schools in order to revise the curriculum and develop instructional programs for gifted and talented students in those schools. Likewise, systematically review the district's central operations and budget to identify opportunities for reallocating resources to better support district priorities.