

Race to the Top

Strategic Communication Framework

May 24, 2011

Executive Summary

This Strategic Communication Framework for the Maryland State Department of Education's (MSDE) Race to the Top (RTTT) program provides detailed information about the strategic approach MSDE will take to communicate with stakeholders in Maryland's RTTT program.

The objective of this Communication Framework is to provide a detailed strategy for engaging and informing all RTTT stakeholders on the implementation, progress, and outcomes of the State's RTTT program. MSDE will use this framework to guide its communication outreach with the goal of engaging stakeholders and providing them with a comprehensive understanding of RTTT.

In addition to the Strategic Framework, two supporting documents/appendices I and II, the RTTT Communication Tools and RTTT Communication Project Activities (utilizing Microsoft Project), have been developed to provide detailed information about the tools and methods MSDE will utilize to communicate with stakeholders and the details of the individual tasks that MSDE will employ to further the goals and outcomes described in this Framework. Together these three documents will provide a comprehensive picture of how MSDE will communicate its RTTT program.

The RTTT Strategic Communication Framework, including the RTTT Communication Tools and RTTT Communication Project Activities are living documents, which will be adjusted as feedback and updates are provided. The specificity of certain projects and plans will also be refined over time.

Project Background

On August 24, 2010, Maryland was awarded one of the Federal Government's coveted RTTT grants in the amount of \$250 million over four years.

RTTT is a \$4.35 billion competitive federal grant program designed to encourage and reward states that are creating the conditions for education innovation and reform. The unprecedented program is aimed at boosting student achievement, reducing gaps in achievement among student subgroups, turning around struggling schools, and improving the teaching profession. RTTT is part of the Federal Government's American Recovery and Reinvestment Act program.

Maryland's Reform Strategy

Over the past three decades, Maryland has built a strong foundation, policy by policy, to achieve national status as a leader in educational excellence. Maryland has been recognized as

Race to the Top

Strategic Communication Framework

May 24, 2011

the nation's number one public school system for the past three years for one simple reason: it does not stand still.

As a winner of \$250 million from the RTTT program, Maryland's objective is to move from national leader to world-class status. Maryland's goal is to continue implementing strategic reforms that will allow the State's students to not only compete with their peers across the nation but compete globally as well.

Building upon the State's solid record of school reform, the Maryland State Department of Education's RTTT program will employ a reform strategy that provides the appropriate challenges and supports to students, educators, and administrators.

Maryland's RTTT program specifically focuses on the following areas of reform:

Higher Standards

Revising the Maryland State Curriculum PreK-12, assessments, and accountability system based on the Common Core State Standards to assure that all graduates are college- and career-ready

Robust Data

Building a statewide technology infrastructure that links all data elements with analytic and instructional tools to monitor and promote student achievement

Effective Educators

Redesigning the model for the preparation, development, retention, and evaluation of teachers and principals

Strategic Help for Struggling Schools

Fully implementing the innovative Breakthrough Center approach for transforming low-achieving schools and districts

STEM Education

Increasing Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) resources for elementary through high school students

Goals and Objectives

As noted above, the State has a long track record of success in regards to education reform. But in order for these new reforms to take root in the day-to-day operations in Maryland's Local Education Agencies (LEAs), schools, and classrooms, all key stakeholders must embrace them.

Race to the Top

Strategic Communication Framework

May 24, 2011

This will require the State to provide stakeholders with timely, accurate information and engage stakeholders as these reforms are developed, implemented, and take root in the classroom.

MSDE's RTTT communication goals are to inform and engage all stakeholders in the implementation, progress, and outcomes of the State's RTTT program.

It is vital to keep all stakeholders informed and updated about Maryland's RTTT program. This will ensure that stakeholders have an understanding of RTTT, how the reforms will affect them, and the State's vision for Maryland schools. It is also important to provide this information in a timely manner so that stakeholders are aware of RTTT news and events as they occur.

Engaging with stakeholders is also crucial. Through direct communication and involvement with stakeholders, the state will receive important feedback and input. Engagement will also keep stakeholders involved in the reform process and help to gain and maintain support for RTTT. Through engagement outreach, the State will create a dialogue with stakeholders that will be valuable to gain support and assistance as RTTT moves forward.

The goal of the State's RTTT Strategic Communication Framework is to provide stakeholders with frequent and thorough communication of RTTT news and information coupled with outreach and engagement that reaches all stakeholder groups.

Stakeholders

MSDE aims to inform and engage a wide range of stakeholders through a variety of targeted communication methods. The State has identified several stakeholder groups with whom communication is critical in order to gain support for Maryland's RTTT program.

Education Stakeholders

This stakeholder group includes teachers, principals, superintendents, students, parents, LEA staff and administrators, representatives of higher education, teachers unions, the State Board of Education, and local boards of education.

Community Stakeholders

This stakeholder group includes members of nonprofit educational organizations, community groups, and business leaders.

MSDE Employees

This stakeholder group includes all Maryland State Department of Education employees.

Race to the Top

Strategic Communication Framework

May 24, 2011

The Media

This stakeholder group includes members of the print and broadcast media at both the local and national levels, specifically members of the media who report on education topics and the State government.

Government Officials

This stakeholder group includes members of the U.S. Department of Education and State and local elected officials (State legislators, the Governor, etc.)

The Public

This stakeholder group includes the public at large (taxpayers), particularly those who may not have direct involvement with Maryland schools. It is important to keep the public informed about what is happening in the State and of the vision of the RTTT program.

Strategies

To reach its goals of keeping stakeholders informed and engaged in the RTTT program, MSDE will employ a variety of communication strategies that reach these targeted audiences on both broad and deep levels. Broad communications aim to reach large audiences with more general information and news about the State's RTTT program, while deep communications will focus on reaching small stakeholder groups with more focused, in-depth communications on specific RTTT topics.

Inform

To keep stakeholders fully informed and up to date about the status of Maryland's RTTT program, MSDE will use approaches such as media outreach to broadly inform the public about RTTT, a variety of MSDE-created publications designed to reach both wide audiences and specific stakeholder groups, social media channels to alert audiences about RTTT news and engage with followers, MSDE-created videos relating RTTT updates as well as background information to viewers, and website updates and online archives of RTTT documents and information.

Engage

To engage stakeholders in Maryland's RTTT program, MSDE will employ outreach strategies such as meetings with stakeholders where participants can interact with MSDE and provide feedback on aspects of the State's RTTT initiatives, events to promote implementation of RTTT programs or acknowledge RTTT successes or milestones, educator outreach programs, presentations, webinars, and other such engagement opportunities and campaigns targeting both wide audiences and narrow groups of stakeholders on specific RTTT topics.

May 24, 2011

RTTT Communication Tools (Appendix 1)

MSDE will employ a broad range of communication tools to fulfill its goals to inform and engage stakeholders about RTTT. Additional tools and strategies may also be added as they are recommended and identified.

Media Outreach

MSDE will reach out to the print and broadcast media to inform them about events and news related to the State's RTTT program as well as respond to requests from reporters for interviews and information about the State's RTTT initiatives. Maryland will use press releases, media alerts, direct call outs and emails to reporters, and other forms of media outreach to communicate with the local, national, and education specific media outlets.

Publications

MSDE will also issue a variety of publications that provide both broad information about the State's RTTT program as well as in-depth information pertaining to specific initiatives and aspects of RTTT. In addition, certain publications will be targeted at specific stakeholder groups. MSDE currently publishes "Maryland Classroom", a newsletter for the State's teachers, and the "Race to the Top Monthly Update", a publication aimed at providing RTTT updates for all stakeholders. These publications, as well as others created as needed for specific events or on certain topics, provide news, information, and insight in to the State's RTTT program.

RTTT Website

MSDE will update and promote its RTTT website, which contains information on the reform program, houses all RTTT-related documents, and provides a location for stakeholders to learn more about all aspects of RTTT. The site will continue to be updated regularly as new information, publications, and videos are created.

RTTT Videos

The State has and will continue to create videos about its RTTT program. These inform viewers about various aspects of RTTT, provide updates on its progression, and give insight in to the work being done by the State. These videos are promoted through LEA superintendents who share them with their teaching staff.

Social Media

MSDE will employ social media sites, such as Facebook and YouTube, to engage with stakeholders and provide updates about RTTT news, events, videos, and other information of interest to this audience. These tools also provide an excellent opportunity for the State to hear directly from the public about the RTTT program. MSDE is also exploring the idea of creating a RTTT blog.

May 24, 2011

Events, Meetings, Presentations, and Webinars

MSDE will support a variety of events, meetings, presentations, and webinars to bring attention to its RTTT program. Many of these programs will be tailored to engage specific stakeholder groups. Some will be targeted to small stakeholder groups and delve deeply into specific RTTT topics, such as the Educator Effectiveness Academies, while others will be aimed at drawing wide audiences to bring attention to the broad aspects of the State's RTTT program. Events, meetings, presentations, and webinars may be held around such themes as the State's anniversary of winning the RTTT grant, reaching specific reform milestone, or educating specific stakeholders on certain aspects of RTTT.

RTTT Stakeholder Representative Groups

MSDE will reach diverse stakeholders through meetings with stakeholder representative groups, such as the Maryland State Board of Education, the Race to the Top Executive Advisory Committee, and the Council for Educator Effectiveness. These groups, comprised of members representing teachers, students, parents, LEAs, unions, business and community associations, higher education, and others, meet regularly to discuss plans for implementing RTTT reforms and provide feedback from the groups they represent. These stakeholder representative groups also bring back information from these meetings to their constituents, providing a direct line of communication about RTTT to these stakeholder groups.

U.S. Department of Education (USDE)

USDE will provide additional publicity, outreach support, and feedback to RTTT winning states as they promote various aspects of their reform programs. Maryland will collaborate with USDE to promote its milestones and more prominent events, garnering additional visibility on a national scale.

RTTT Communication Project Activities (Appendix 2)

Utilizing Microsoft Project, the second appendix is the RTTT Communication Project Activities document. This document includes the specific tasks, milestones, and timeline for each of the four years of the grant. Activities for years two, three, and four will be added.

Challenges

To reach its communication goals, MSDE must reach out to many stakeholder groups and present information through a variety of communication channels. One challenge for the State will be ensuring it presents a consistent message across these varied communication platforms

and stakeholder groups. Whether the communication comes via a news report, a presentation, or an outreach event, MSDE must present all stakeholders with a unified message. Additionally,

Race to the Top Strategic Communication Framework

May 24, 2011

RTTT news and information must be shared in a timely fashion, while also ensuring the accuracy and consistency of the communication.

MSDE's RTTT communications and messaging also must remain focused and consistent during a time of transition upon the retirement of the State's current Superintendent and the appointment of the next Superintendent.

Conclusion

Maryland's RTTT program will bring comprehensive education reform to the State that will impact a wide and diverse range of stakeholders. It is vital that MSDE thoroughly inform and engage all stakeholders to increase their understanding of and support for RTTT. To achieve these goals, MSDE must utilize a variety of communication tools and strategies and provide information in a timely, consistent, and accurate manner.

Utilizing these communication documents, the RTTT Strategic Communication Framework and the appendices, the RTTT Communication Tools, and the RTTT Project Activities, MSDE has a defined strategy for successfully connecting with all stakeholders.