



**Maine Association for Charter Schools**

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## **Maine Risks Losing Large Federal Grants**

Maine Commissioner of Education Susan Gendron announced on Nov. 17<sup>th</sup> that Governor Baldacci will not introduce a bill to allow public charter schools during the 2010 legislative session. Many Maine families and educators look to public charter schools to bring more innovation and more options to Maine's public education system.

The Governor's decision dashes their hopes, and also risks Maine's access to millions of dollars in federal grants for public education during a time of increasingly severe budget shortfalls.

Maine is eligible for up to \$75 million, and possibly more, in the federal Race to the Top grant competition for \$4.35 billion for education reform. Maine has been warned by Washington, however, that without charter school legislation, the state's chances of receiving any Race to the Top grant will be seriously handicapped.

By changing course and introducing enabling legislation, Governor Baldacci could still change the odds dramatically. Maine would show it is serious about finding new ways to improve student outcomes. Maine could lead the 11 states without a charter school law. Maine could also lead the nation by passing a strong law. The bill currently proposed is the first based on a new model bill that reflects best practices learned from 18 years of charter school experience in other states.

Other federal grant money is also at stake. The Charter School Grant Program awards about \$450,000 to each new or conversion public charter school for planning and startup expenses. The Maine Department of Education would get 5% to administer a charter school program. These grants would bring new resources to districts to help at risk students.

President Obama has called for the expansion of public charter schools to promote educational innovation nationwide. The Race to the Top funds could be used to support dozens of innovative educational initiatives in Maine that address children's needs.

If Maine's Race to the Top application in Round Two is not successful, Maine taxpayers will still be paying their share of the \$4.35 billion education stimulus grants for generations to come. But the benefits will go to other states.

There are now 4,900 charter schools educating 1.5 million students in forty other states. Voluntary public charter schools have been called the most significant educational reform since "The Nation at Risk" was published in 1983. They are open enrollment schools with no admissions tests, non-religious, and free to parents.

There is growing support in the Maine House and Senate for using public charter schools as a powerful tool to help meet the significant, growing needs of Maine's children. The Governor could make a major contribution by changing his position and introducing, promoting, and signing into law high quality charter school legislation during the 2010 legislative session.

FMI about the benefits of the charter school model in public education, how it is working in 40 other states, and how these options could work in Maine, see [www.mainecharterschools.org](http://www.mainecharterschools.org).

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