

# Fresno Bee

## **Editorial: California Should Tap into Teacher Incentive Program**

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Last month, President Barack Obama announced a competition among the states for \$4.35 billion in "Race to the Top" grants, the largest pot of money for education reform in history. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan called the effort the "equivalent of education reform's moon shot."

California, of course, should tap this fund to make big improvements in student achievement. Obama has made it clear that states leading the way in four core areas can win hundreds of millions of dollars, if they can show that they are:

Setting and enforcing rigorous standards.

Turning around historically low-performing schools.

Using data to determine student needs and measure teacher effectiveness.

Putting the top teachers in classrooms, especially in poverty schools and in hard-to-staff subjects such as math, science and special education.

On the teacher front, California has one advantage and one major disadvantage in seeking the grants.

States have to show that they have alternative routes to certification for teachers, in addition to the traditional education school degree. Since the 1980s, California has had alternative programs that tap second-career professionals to teach in public schools.

Over the past six years, nearly 50,000 teachers have come through these programs. In fact, half of the math teachers the state credentialed last year came out of alternative programs.

These mid-career recruits have deep content expertise and life experience. They cite a desire to "give back" and to "serve the community" as a reason to switch to teaching -- and 80% remain in teaching after five years.

But California remains weak in a key area: measuring teacher effectiveness. As the president said, "Success should be judged by results, and data is a powerful tool to determine results. ... That's why any state that makes it unlawful to link student progress to teacher evaluations will have to change its ways if it wants to compete for a grant."

California is one of those states. As we have said in the past, the Legislature should repeal the law prohibiting using student performance data to evaluate teachers. States have the opportunity to compete for Race to the Top funds. California should do what it takes to be among them.