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# NY in the 'Race' for \$50m in school reform

By CARL CAMPANILE  
 New York, which recently passed state laws to promote charter schools and impose stricter teacher evaluations, was named one of 39 finalists yesterday for federal Race to the Top grants.

It's the second round of state school reform proposals being judged by the Obama administration, which has set aside up to \$3.4 billion for the program.

New York also was a finalist in the previous round, but failed to win any kind of grant submitting a weak application that didn't hit the cap on charter schools or tighten teacher evaluations.

Only two of the 16 finalists during that round were awarded grants earlier this year — Delaware and Tennessee.

Since then, a number of leading states — including New York — took actions to refine and bolster their school-reform plans after being tumbled in the first round.

Three dozen states submitted revised proposals in the second round. Other second-round finalists announced yesterday include California, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, District of Columbia, Illinois and Colorado.



## Head of the class

Big school bucks are at stake in the bid to win the feds' Race to the Top:

- NY state has been named one of 19 second-round finalists.
- Only two states received awards in the first round, but 10 to 15 second-round winners are expected to be announced in September.
- NY's award could be up to \$500 million.
- Our revised plan includes raising the cap on charter schools to 460 and setting up stricter teacher evaluations.
- A third round of applications will be reviewed by the feds in 2011.

US Education Secretary Arne Duncan (left) yesterday applauded New York's grant application.

Each state's proposal is scored by an independent panel of judges hired by the feds. The scores of New York and other finalists were an average of 26 points higher than the scores they were awarded during the first round.

"New York has come a heck of a long way," said US Education Secretary Arne Duncan. "New York's application in the first round was near the bottom. New York has taken a huge step in the right direction."

Duncan, in a conference call with reporters, added, "The state of New York

should be very proud of the progress it made from Round 1 to Round 2."  
 Duncan, said 10 to 15 states will get school reform funds when second-round awards are announced in September. New York is seeking up to \$500 million. A third round of grants will be awarded next year.

The education reform outlined in New York's revised application includes:

- The Legislature agreeing to lift the cap on charter schools even higher, from 200 to 460.
- A plan to allow student progress to stand out

examined to account for 40 percent of a teacher's evaluation.

■ Getting the backing of 80 percent of the school districts and the powerful United Federation of Teachers for the application.

"We have earned our way into being considered a finalist," said Merryl Tisch, chancellor of the state Board of Regents.

New York's application includes support for more rigorous standards and setting up a new data system to track student and teacher performance.

Yesterday's announce-

ment drew praise from Mayor Bloomberg, Schools Chancellor Joel Klein, Gov. Paterson, legislative leaders and school reformers.

"These reforms not only make New York's application more competitive, but they also will help us strengthen New York City schools," Bloomberg said.

Said Paterson, "I am confident that with these reforms, New York's application in this second round will be successful and that we will win the necessary funds to help ensure our children have access to quality education."

NYC Charter Schools Center CEO James Merriman said, "New York put out a stronger application this year and we have a better chance of getting the money."

But Merriman said one deficiency still exists: The state shrank charter schools in funding.

Meanwhile, national education reformers slammed the bids for funding, some stating that submitted "status quo" plans — such as Kentucky and Maryland — as finalists.

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 ■ Arnie Duncan / P. 27

# Away pol's budget delay

By BRENDAN SCOTT and FREDRIC U. DICKER

**Post Correspondents**  
 MANY — An ill-timed vacation by embattled Queens state Sen. Malcolm Smith could cost Democrats their crucial 32nd vote in a special session today and delay a budget deal for at least another week.

Senate sources said the Senate president, Joseph L. Bruno — whose business dealings and role in selecting a casino operator for

the Aqueduct Racetrack is under federal investigation — was "away" and wouldn't attend the session this week.

Smith's absence would make it all-but-impossible for senators to pass a \$1 billion revenue bill needed to complete the \$134.4 billion budget, now nearly four months overdue.

The overwhelmingly Democratic Assembly passed the legislation in June. But the party has a bare one-vote majority in

the Senate, and Republicans say they're unified in opposition to the tax-laden bill.

Democratic Conference Leader John Sampson of Brooklyn said the Senate wouldn't act on the budget bill until the required agreement with Gov. Paterson and the Assembly speaker on several outstanding issues.

"When there is an agreement, we will move forward," Sampson said.

# CORRECTION

In Monday's editions of the New York Post, we published a story that confessed wife-killer Johnny Conception underwent a liver-transplant operation at New York-Presbyterian Hospital.

The hospital yesterday issued a statement that no such operation took place. The Post relied on two NYPD sources for its report, and it is now evident they were misinformed. We apologize to our readers for the error.

Prior to publishing the story, The Post sought official response from New York-Presbyterian. The Post was denied information by the hospital, which stated it could not discuss individual cases because it was in breach of the Health Information Privacy Act (HIPAA).

Curiously, the hospital now sees itself free to publicly discuss Conception's case.