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Wednesday, August 25, 2010

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N.J. loses out on \$400M in education funds due to administrative error

By Jordan Fabian - 08/25/10 12:36 PM ET

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New Jersey narrowly lost out on \$400 million in federal "Race to the Top" education funding this week in part because of an administrative error.

The *Newark Star-Ledger* reported Tuesday night that the administration of Gov. Chris Christie (R) mistakenly filled out a portion of its application that cost the state almost five points on the ratings scale.

The five-point question asked for budget information comparing the 2008 and 2009 school years. But the state entered data comparing the current year to 2011 instead.

Here is more from the *Star-Ledger*:

That mistake cost the state 4.8 points. The state lost points in other areas as well, the records show.

In the end, New Jersey received 437.8 out of a possible 500 points, placing it 11th in the competition, just behind Ohio, which received \$400 million and was the last state to receive funding. The winners of the \$4.35 billion competition were announced today in Washington, D.C.

"New Jersey did not supply the 2008-2009 data as required and therefore forfeits the points," said the report from one of the federal reviewers scoring the competition.

The Obama administration announced this week that nine states and Washington, D.C., would share \$3.4 billion in education funding provided by the "Race to the Top" program as the 10 finalists.

New Jersey finished in 11th place behind Ohio, which was awarded \$400 million.

States must apply for the grants by showing they will use the funds to implement reforms such as teacher performance standards and increasing

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According to the *Star-Ledger*, there is no appeals process for the grants. Gov. Christie signed the application on June 1.

New Jersey's bid touted tenure reform, merit pay and school choice.

The first phase of the grants were awarded earlier this year.

UPDATED 3:13 P.M.

Christie on Wednesday acknowledged clerical errors made by his administration were to blame for losing out on the funds, but blamed the Obama administration for not allowing New Jersey to correct the mistake.

The *Newark Star-Ledger* reports:

"This is the stuff, candidly, that drives people crazy about government and crazy about Washington," Christie said at a news conference after an unrelated bill signing.

Christie slapped two thick three-ringed binders on the podium containing more than 1,000 pages of the state's "Race to the Top" application and appendices, noting that just one piece of paper contained the error.

"The first part of it is the mistake of putting the wrong piece of paper in," Christie said. "It drives people crazy and, believe me, I'm not thrilled about it. But the second part is, does anybody in Washington, D.C. have a lick of common sense? Pick up the phone and ask us for the number."

[...]

"That's the stuff the Obama administration should answer for. Are you guys just down there checking boxes like mindless drones, or are you thinking?" said Christie. "When the president comes back to New Jersey, he's going to have to explain to the people of the state of New Jersey why he's depriving them of \$400 million that this application earned."

Christie said the mistake was made by a mid-level official at the state Department of Education, and that he would not name him because he did not want to scapegoat anyone.

"We'll take the responsibility we need to take for putting one wrong piece of paper in a thousand page application," he said. "If you want to take shots, take shots at me."

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