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Letters to the Editor

Action group concerned by lack of action

To the Editor:

Last week, hundreds Indiana school corporations signed off on agreements to join the federal Race to the Top competition in an effort to bring much needed reforms and money to the state's struggling school systems.

Unfortunately, not everyone was excited about moving in "Fast Forward," the name of Indiana's Race to the Top initiative. Of the 320 school corporations which turned in agreements to participate, about 100 lacked signatures from local teachers union representatives.

At both Linton-Stockton and Eastern Greene schools, for example, union leaders refused to join school board officials and superintendents in signing on to collect its share of up to \$250 million, if Indiana is selected for the competitive federal grants.

We at the Education Action Group Foundation (ISTAexposed.com) believe that's a shame, especially considering Gov. Mitch Daniels' recent announcement that \$300 million will be cut from the state's education budget.

There are strings attached to the federal funds. School officials would be required to tie a teacher's evaluation to student performance, better evaluate students to help them transition into college or the workforce, and help to devise ways for the state to ensure improvement of chronically failing schools.

We believe these are very good things for Indiana schools, whether or not RTTT funding comes through.

Officials with the Indiana State School Board Association said the agreements corporations sent into the state simply express preliminary interest in the Fast Forward program and schools can choose to opt out of some of reforms later. But schools that don't have the endorsement of the board, superintendent and union leader, could be left out in the cold if federal funds roll in this spring.

In other words, because Indiana State Teachers Association leaders aren't too keen on some of the reforms, many school corporations could miss out on big money. That seems selfish to us.

EAGF does, however, applaud the hard work of state officials, and we appreciate the tough decisions facing Indiana's school corporations. Their signatures show how many school officials are committed to these long-overdue reforms.

We're just discouraged that not everyone is motivated to that end. Unfortunately, the ISTA has served as more of a road block for reforms than a role model for the teachers it represents.

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