

Florida House of Representatives

Representative Martin David Kiar

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Attention Editors,

The following is an Opinion Page submission from State Rep. Martin David Kiar, D-Davie, of Florida House District 97. Please consider publishing the article, which runs at about 275 words, at your earliest convenience.

The Race to the Top initiative is very important for Florida.

President Barack Obama's administration has taken a serious interest in ensuring our children receive a better education. The Race to the Top initiative is a contest among states to initiate bold education reforms. Florida could receive between \$350 million and \$750 million for public schools. The strength of the application rests largely on a Memorandum of Understanding that outlines strategies for using the Race to the Top grant.

Each state is awarded points toward winning a grant if school superintendants, school board chairs and presidents of teachers unions sign the memorandum. Unfortunately, the document drafted by Florida's Department of Education may not suffice, in part, because it fails to capture recommendations from the Florida Education Association. The result is a memorandum that calls for an expansion of existing failed policies rather than striving toward bold reforms.

The memorandum expands the use of the current Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT), which is widely disliked by parents, teachers and students. Unfortunately, the memorandum mandates that school districts use the FCAT as the "primary factor" in determining such important matters as compensation for teachers, evaluations of teachers and principals, financial and other incentives for school employees, teacher tenure, and the circumstances under which an ineffective teacher's employment can be terminated.

The memorandum drafted by the Florida Department of Education appears to be little more than a political strategy to fortify Florida's dependence on the FCAT. It jeopardizes Florida's chances for receiving financial incentives for education innovation.

I urge the Department of Education to revise the Memorandum of Understanding with input from superintendants, school boards and the teachers unions.

**Education Policy Council • Government Accountability Act Council
PreK-12 Policy Committee • PreK-12 Appropriations Committee**