



Race to the Top: What Have We Learned from the States So Far?

A State-by-State Evaluation of Race to the Top Performance

Ulrich Boser March 2012

Center for American Progress



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Introduction and summary

The Race to the Top, or RTT, fund might be the Obama administration's most significant education initiative. A \$4.35 billion competitive grant program, RTT aims to kick-start key education reforms in states and districts and create the conditions for greater educational innovation. "America will not succeed in the 21st century unless we do a far better job of educating our sons and daughters," President Barack Obama said when he announced the program in July 2009.¹ "The race starts today."

Part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, or ARRA, Race to the Top promises to help states and districts close achievement gaps and get more students into college by supporting key reform strategies including:

- Adopting more rigorous standards and assessments
- Recruiting, evaluating, and retaining highly effective teachers and principals
- Turning around low-performing schools
- Building data systems that measure student success

States that applied for the grant also had to show momentum around collaboration and reform as well as promise to work in key innovation areas, including expanding support for high-performing charter schools and reinvigorating math and science education.

Forty states and the District of Columbia eventually applied for funding, and the U.S. Department of Education announced the winners of Phase 1—Delaware and Tennessee—in March 2010. The Department of Education released the names of the Phase 2 winners in August 2010, and they included the District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, and Rhode Island. (Note: Another seven states received RTT Phase 3 grants in December 2011. This report does not examine their performance.)

The Phase 1 and 2 winners quickly began moving ahead on implementation and many used the dollars to fund major projects. Maryland, for instance, trained a team of teachers and a principal from every school on the Common Core, a set of new and more rigorous academic standards that are internationally benchmarked. But since the first grants were awarded, there have also been some setbacks and delays. In Hawaii, for example, the state's implementation of its grant has been "unsatisfactory," according to the Department of Education, and in late 2010, it placed the state in "high risk" status.

At the same time, the Obama administration has continued to push for new competitive grants. The president had been promoting a second Race to the Top challenge, and in his most recent budget request, he asked for an additional \$1.35 billion for the RTT program. The president's recent budget also put forth another new competitive program called the RESPECT Project, requesting \$5 billion to help schools attract, support, and reward great teachers.

In light of these developments, we wanted to engage in a project that would dig into RTT and get a better sense of what exactly was happening within the states that won the grants. What was going well? What was going wrong? What early lessons could be drawn for future federal education initiatives? To answer these questions, we enlisted a team of researchers to investigate each state's RTT efforts. We spoke to key stakeholders as well as examined research and implementation documents.

We also evaluated the states on their efforts, benchmarking their success against a set of key indicators. The ratings for each state are available on page 15 of this report. While we believe that our evaluations of state performance rely on the best available data and methods, we caution against making firm conclusions about the individual ratings of a state. For one, our evaluation of state RTT performance is not summative. The states are still in the early stages of their work and continue to implement key initiatives as this publication goes to press. Nor is our work exhaustive. The Department of Education has contracted with three top-flight research firms to conduct a full study of RTT, but it will be years until that report will be released.

Still with debates around the effectiveness of RTT growing louder, we believed it was important to take a look at what was happening in the states and gain a better sense of the program's early successes and failures. And despite significant caveats, we believe our evaluations of the states and the District of Columbia are the best available, given existing traditions and knowledge.

Overall, we found that although a lot of work remains to be done, RTT has sparked significant school reform efforts and shows that significant policy changes are possible. Among our specific findings:

- **Race to the Top has advanced the reform agenda, particularly around the Common Core and next-generation teacher evaluations.** RTT has done a lot to move forward the implementation of the Common Core, helping states develop robust professional development opportunities around the new standards. States have also used their RTT dollars to create new teacher- and principal-evaluation systems that include student learning as a component, and our research found that all of the states have either piloted or implemented new teacher-evaluation systems.
- **Many states are largely on track with their RTT commitments.** For the most part, states are making strong progress and have met many of their early Race to the Top commitments. And under our evaluation rubric, most of the states appear to be meeting expectations. A few states have been struggling, however, and due to a variety of reasons from political missteps to poor communications efforts, some states like Florida and Hawaii have had a hard time maintaining momentum.
- **In some states, there's been little collaboration between key stakeholders, and states could do more to communicate reforms.** In New York more than 1,000 principals have signed a petition protesting the new teacher-evaluation system, and a number of districts in the state, including New York City, have not yet been able to reach agreements with their teacher's union on the details of the new teacher evaluations. In other states, teacher's unions and other groups have also taken issue with some of the program's priorities, with teacher evaluation almost always being the most contentious issue. States could do more to communicate reforms, and we found that only five states post information from their monthly check-in calls with the Department of Education online. In other states it can take numerous calls to get basic information about a state's work under the grant.
- **Every state has delayed some part of their grant implementation, and some observers worry about a lack of capacity.** The delays vary widely. Massachusetts has postponed the development of a teacher-career ladder, while North Carolina has delayed its "instructional improvement system," an initiative that aims to help teachers improve classroom practice. Given that it's still early in the four-year grant, all the states still have the opportunity to recover and meet their goals. Still, some observers worry about the lack of capacity to execute complicated reform initiatives given tight deadlines. Or as one Florida reporter said:

“Only a handful of districts feel like they’re prepared to do [new teacher evaluations]. Most feel like they’re rushing.”

- **Some states will most likely not accomplish all of the goals outlined in their grants.** The goals that many of the states outlined in their applications are very high. Hawaii aims to erase the achievement gap by 2018, while Tennessee promises to have 100 percent of its students proficient in math and reading by 2014. States and districts very rarely, if ever, have reached such high achievement benchmarks, and it’s almost certain that some of the states will not meet their goals.
- **The U.S. Department of Education has played an important role in the program’s success.** The Department of Education has been holding states accountable for their performance. It has rejected amendments as well as made it clear that some states are not doing enough to execute their promises. This approach is new. Historically, the Department of Education has not had either the tools or the political will to push states in this way. The Department of Education has also done a lot to help states with implementation. State officials in Tennessee, for instance, have praised the Department of Education’s efforts to support their work.

In light of our findings, we recommend:

- **States should build capacity for reform.** States promised a great deal in their Race to the Top grants. If states plan to achieve these lofty goals they will need to do far more to improve capacity at the state and local levels to deliver on their promises. This means investing in both the people and the technology needed to produce results. It also means creating better management structures so that educators have the autonomy to innovate.
- **States must do far more to improve communications with stakeholders.** Many states don’t appear to have reliable ways to get information out to key stakeholders, and when they do make the attempt, they often produce glossy, overly optimistic documents that do little to build trust. This needs to change.
- **Collaboration among key interest groups—administrators, unions, and parents—will be key to the success of Race to the Top and states and districts must do more to create buy-in.** In some states, the voices of key stakeholders have not been heard, and so we recommend that states and districts do more to build a big tent when it comes to RTT implementation.

- **Competitive programs have impact.** This recommendation may seem familiar, but it only underscores its importance, and we hope that this report demonstrates the case for additional competitive programs based on the results of the early success of RTT. Congress should support the Obama administration's efforts to create additional competitive programs as well as fund another RTT program.
- **The Department of Education should continue to play a strong role in monitoring and supporting state performance.** The Department of Education has been closely following state RTT performance and shown a clear willingness to hold states accountable. The Department of Education should not waver in this regard since it appears that such support and monitoring has improved the effectiveness of the program.

We suffer under no illusion that a single competitive grant program will sustain a total revamping of the nation's education system. Nor do we believe that a program like RTT will be implemented exactly as it was imagined—one of the goals of the program was to figure out what works when it comes to education reform. Yet two things have become abundantly clear. There's a lot that still needs to be done when it comes to Race to the Top, and many states still have some of the hardest work in front of them. But it's also clear that a program like Race to the Top holds a great deal of promise and can spark school reform efforts and show that important substantive changes to our education system can be successful.

Background

On February 17, 2009, President Obama signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, or ARRA. The law had a very simple mission: kick-start an economic recovery through strategic investment. Deep within the law were a number of key education initiatives, including Race to the Top, which was a way to invest in the nation's education system and spur efforts to reform schools. "It's time to stop just talking about education reform and start actually doing it. It's time to make education America's national mission," the president said.²

Race to the Top is part of a bigger effort by the administration to invest in critical sectors while supporting innovation. Education is key to the nation's future and a strong middle-class, but our public school system is rigid and archaic. Most education institutions lack the tools, incentives, and opportunities to transform themselves in profoundly more effective ways. And after years of weak reforms, our school systems consistently produce many students who are ill prepared for college or the modern workplace.

Race to the Top aimed to change that by sparking reform and creating the conditions for greater educational innovation. The program was competitive, which means that all states would need to submit an application in order to receive the funds. This encouraged innovation since states needed to develop their own approaches to reform. At the same time, the program aimed to continue the reform momentum that had already taken hold within the states and defined four key priority areas:³

- Designing and implementing rigorous standards and high-quality assessments by encouraging states to work together toward a system of common academic standards that are benchmarked to international standards.
- Attracting and keeping great teachers and leaders by expanding support to educators; improving teacher preparation; revising evaluation and compensation policies to encourage effectiveness; and helping to ensure that our most talented educators are placed in the schools and subjects where they are needed the most.
- Supporting data systems that inform decisions and improve instruction by fully implementing a statewide longitudinal data system and making data more accessible to key stakeholders.

- Using innovation and effective approaches to turn around low-performing schools.

Beyond these four content areas, the program also emphasized the degree to which a state would sustain education reform. This included promoting collaborations between business leaders, educators, and other stakeholders to raise student achievement. The program also emphasized key innovation areas, including expanding support for high-performing public charter schools and reinvigorating math and science education.

To apply for a grant, states had to submit a detailed application and the Department of Education rewarded points if the application met certain criteria and policies. Applications for Phase I of the program were due in early 2010 and 40 states and the District of Columbia applied for funding, with Delaware and Tennessee winning grants in the first round. Phase II winners were announced in September 2010. In the end there were 12 winners in the second round of the program, including the District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, and Rhode Island. (Another seven states received RTT Phase 3 grants in December 2011. This report does not examine their performance.)

The program scored some significant victories even before any of the money was awarded. Part of the reason was that the program was competitive, which meant that states tried to outdo each other in order to win a grant. In addition the program came on-line during some of the worst of the Great Recession when states were particularly desperate to score federal dollars. In the end more than 25 states reformed their education policies in 2009 and 2010 in order to better prepare for the first two rounds of the competition. Illinois, for instance, passed an education reform law in 2011 to help its chances to win the grant. That law included significant reforms, including revamping state policies on teacher hiring, tenure, and dismissal.

But not long after the announcement of Race to the Top winners by the Department of Education, there was evidence of some confusion about how exactly the program was faring. In some states there were clear success stories. Early on, for instance, Delaware was able to use RTT funds to place data coaches in every school in the state. But due to the speed and variety of the initiatives, some states appeared to have difficulty communicating details of their RTT efforts to the public. In New York, for example, some believed that the state comptroller's rejection of a contract with a for-profit technology company could potentially sink the state's teacher-evaluation system. This was not actually the case, and according to state officials, the rejected contract had no impact on the teacher-evaluation system.

It also became clear that some states were beginning to struggle to meet their commitments. In June 2011 the Government Accountability Office, or GAO, released a report that found that states were having difficulties hiring well-qualified people to administer Race to the Top projects.⁴ A number of state advocates also released studies looking at their state's progress that warned that aspects of the program were in jeopardy. "Massachusetts' ability to fulfill its overall RTT goals is at risk if the state does not address the issue of quality control for its 258 participating districts," concluded a 2011 report from the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education.⁵

The Department of Education has also been closely monitoring state performance. States must submit any requests to change their grants in writing, and a number of such requests from states have been rejected. In early January, the Department of Education warned Hawaii that it was in "high-risk" status because of the state's uneven implementation process. "They are in danger of losing their resources," said Secretary of Education Arne Duncan.⁶ "This hasn't been a great year for Hawaii."

The setbacks have inspired some to disparage the effectiveness of RTT. One critic noted that "The rosy overall assessment [from the Department of Education] is troubling," adding that the winners were being held only "half-way accountable."⁷ At the same time, some of the states appeared to be providing the public with overly optimistic assessments of their work and continue to promise dramatic increases in student achievement, despite lackluster implementation efforts.

Given the importance of RTT we wanted to take a closer look and get a better sense of what exactly was happening within the states that won the grants in Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the program. We wanted to determine what's going well? And what's going wrong? Were the states on track to meet all of the goals detailed in their grants? How has Department of Education helped or hindered implementation? And finally, what lessons could be drawn for future federal education initiatives?

To answer these questions we enlisted a team of researchers to dig deep into each state's Race to the Top efforts. We spoke to key stakeholders, examined various budget and implementation documents, and sifted through performance data provided by the Department of Education. As part of our evaluation effort, we also evaluated the states based on their performance, benchmarking their success against a set of key indicators. (The ratings for each state are available on page 15 of this report).

To be clear, our evaluation is not exhaustive. The data that's available across the states is limited at this point in time. Nor are our metrics meant to be summative. Many

states are only a year into their RTT grants with a lot of work remaining to be done. Moreover, the Department of Education has contracted for a five-year, \$18 million study of Race to the Top, hiring Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., American Institutes for Research, and Social Policy Research Associates to rigorously evaluate the program. That evaluation, however, isn't scheduled for release until 2014. With debates concerning the effectiveness of the RTT program growing louder, we thought it made sense to take a hard look at what exactly was happening in the states and provide some interim indicators on their successes and failures.

Overall, we found that although a lot of work remains to be done, RTT has sparked significant school reform efforts and demonstrates that significant policy changes are possible. Among our specific findings:

- **Race to the Top has advanced the reform agenda, particularly around the Common Core and new teacher evaluations.** RTT has done a lot to move forward implementation of the Common Core, helping states develop professional development opportunities. Delaware, for instance, reports that 79 percent of its teachers received training on Common Core standards by June 2011. States have also used their RTT dollars to create new evaluation systems that are already dramatically changing teaching and learning, and our evaluation found that all of the states have either piloted or implemented new teacher evaluation systems. In Tennessee, educators were trained on the new evaluation system during the summer of 2011 and the new system was implemented in the 2011-12 school year.

Moreover, in some states like Delaware and New York, the goals of RTT have become blended together with the state's reform goals and the RTT "brand" has been less visible. "People aren't talking about Race to the Top much," explains Philissa Cramer a reporter for *GothamSchools*, an online newspaper based in New York City. Instead the focus of the debate in New York is around either the city or the state and their efforts to improve schools, she says. "The policy agenda hasn't changed."

- **Many states are largely on track with their RTT commitments.** For the most part, states are making strong progress and have met many of their early Race to the Top commitments. Under our evaluation rubric, most of the states appear to be meeting expectations. But some states have struggled to keep up momentum due to a variety of reasons, including political missteps and poor communications efforts. State budget cuts and teacher contract disputes delayed implemen-

tation of several RTT promises in Hawaii, for instance, including lengthening the school year and rewarding teachers who improve student learning. The Department of Education ultimately labeled the state a “high-risk” grantee for making inadequate progress.

To be sure, even some of the states that have had some highly visible setbacks have been able to deliver on many of their goals, and Hawaii has increased the rigor of its graduation requirements, mandating all students earn a college and career diploma beginning with the class of 2016—two years earlier than planned. And every school in the state now has access to an online bank of classroom assessments aligned to Common Core standards. Teachers and principals can pull questions from the bank to measure student progress and they receive customized data reports of the results.

- **In some states, there’s been too little collaboration between key stakeholders, and states could do more to communicate reforms.** In New York, more than 1,000 principals have signed a petition protesting the new evaluation system, and a number of districts in the state, including New York City, have not yet been able to reach agreements with their teachers union on the details of the new teacher evaluations. In other states, teacher unions along with other groups have taken issue with some of the program’s priorities, with teacher evaluation almost always being the most contentious issue. This lack of buy-in has led to delays in implementation in some areas.

Many states also don’t do enough to communicate their reforms, and we found that only five states post detailed information from their monthly check-in call with the Department of Education online. In other states it can take several calls to get basic information about a state’s work under the grant. Most states also don’t appear to have reliable ways to get information out to key stakeholders, and when they do make the attempt, they often produce glossy, overly upbeat documents that do little to build trust.

To be sure, some states have been successful in this area and they’ve been able to maintain the support of key stakeholders. “Our organization is supportive and working with the Department of Education to implement Race to the Top,” says Deb Tully, director of professional issues at the Ohio Federation of Teachers. “We have been at the table with the RTT teams,” says Angela Farthing of the North Carolina Association of Educators.

- **Every state has changed or delayed some part of their grants, and some observers worry about capacity.** The delays vary widely. Massachusetts has postponed the development of a teacher-career ladder. North Carolina has delayed its “instructional improvement system,” an initiative that aims to help teachers improve classroom practice. Teacher evaluation is often the thorniest issue. In New York the state teachers union filed a lawsuit last year over the details of the evaluation system, which has since been resolved but nonetheless has hampered implementation. Delaware delayed its new teacher-evaluation system by one year, giving the state more time to develop student growth measures.

Almost all of the states have also struggled with data systems development, and many missed milestones related to the reform effort. Florida’s selection process for a vendor to create a new inventory of test items, among other projects, is running behind. Massachusetts has also struggled to expand its existing data warehouse and to add new features.

Observers also worry about that quality of implementation given tight deadlines. Districts in Florida were supposed to begin using new teacher evaluations by mid-October 2011. That left little time to train administrators how to use them, says Jeffrey Solochek, an education reporter with the *Tampa Bay Times*, which serves the Tampa Bay area. “Only a handful of districts feel like they’re prepared to do that,” he says. “Most feel like they’re rushing.”

But in many ways, some changes and delays are not surprising. Few social programs—whether it’s education or health care—are implemented in exactly the way that they were conceived and it can take time to build capacity. Moreover, one of the goals of Race to the Top was to figure out what works when it comes to education reform, thus some mid-course corrections are to be expected. Ultimately only time will tell if these delays and changes help to improve or hinder the RTT effort.

- **Some states will almost certainly not accomplish all of the goals outlined in their grants.** Many states set very high goals in their RTT applications. Hawaii aims to have 100 percent proficiency and erase the achievement gap by 2018, while New York promises to raise its NAEP scores significantly, even though they’ve actually been trending downward. Tennessee aims to have 100 percent proficiency in reading and math on state assessments by 2014. Given the overall difficulty of raising student achievement, it’s highly unlikely that all of the states will meet all of their performance targets. States have also struggled

in other areas, such as setting up new teacher-evaluation systems. And while it's still early within the grant, it seems almost certain that some states will fail to meet all of their promises.

- **The U.S. Department of Education has played a strong role in monitoring and supporting state performance.** The Department of Education has been holding states accountable for their performance. The department has rejected amendments as well as made it clear that some states are not doing enough to execute their promises. Delaware, for instance, proposed changing how it defined its rating of highly effective teachers, a request that was rejected by the Department of Education.⁸ Additionally, the Department of Education has released detailed analyses of each state's performance under year one of the grant and posted the summaries online. This approach is new. Historically, the Department of Education has not had either the tools or the political will to push states in this way.

The Department of Education has also done a lot to help states with Race to the Top implementation. State officials in Tennessee have praised the Department of Education's efforts to support their work. Tennessee's experience isn't unique, and the Department of Education communicates regularly with the RTT states to monitor and support their efforts.

Evaluating RTT performance

One of the central aims of our study is to draw attention to RTT implementation and while we believe that our evaluations rely on the best available data and methods, we caution against making firm conclusions about the individual ratings of a state. For one, these are interim indicators, a look at how states have done within the first year or so of the grant. Moreover, the data itself has number of limitations, which we describe in significant detail below. Despite these caveats, we believe our evaluations are the best available given existing traditions and knowledge.

Race to the Top implementation: Evaluating the states

While progress is uneven, states have met many of their promises

We wanted to examine implementation of the Race to the Top (RTT) program: What’s going well? What’s going wrong? Will the states meet all of the goals detailed in their grants? The evaluation below represents an effort to benchmark the states on their efforts thus far.

State	Evaluations	Has the U.S. Department of Education deemed the state’s performance to be adequate?	Does the state have the support of major stakeholders?	State Spending Index (out of 10)	Has the state piloted or implemented a new teacher evaluation system?	Common Core Planning Index (out of three)	Data Systems Index (out of five)	Does the state post monthly updates online?
		Weights	40 percent	30 percent	10 percent	10 percent	5 percent	5 percent
Delaware	Meeting expectations	Yes	Yes	10	Yes	2	3	
District of Columbia	Meeting expectations	Yes	Yes	9	Yes	0	1	
Florida	Not meeting expectations	Yes	No	8	Yes	2	5	
Georgia	Meeting expectations	Yes	Yes	6	Yes	3	4	Yes
Hawaii	Not meeting expectations	No	No	3	Yes	2	2	
Maryland	Meeting expectations	Yes	Yes	5	Yes	3	0	Yes
Massachusetts	Meeting expectations	Yes	Yes	7	Yes	3	3	
New York	Meeting expectations	Yes	Yes	0*	Yes	3	4	
North Carolina	Meeting expectations	Yes	Yes	10	Yes	3	3	Yes
Ohio	Meeting expectations	Yes	Yes	7	Yes	1	5	Yes
Rhode Island	Meeting expectations	Yes	Yes	3	Yes	2	3	
Tennessee	Meeting expectations	Yes	Yes	9	Yes	1	4	Yes

Please see page 71 for sources and methodology.

NOTE: If a column was shaded gray, it was not used to calculate the evaluations.

* A zero in this column does not indicate that the state has not spent any of its RTT funds. Rather, we gave each state a numerical score based on the rate at which the state was spending down its RTT grants, adjusting the expenditures for the length of the time since the grant was awarded as well as the size of the grant. So while New York has spent some of its RTT funds, it has done so at a slower rate than other states.

With the goal of providing evaluations of state RTT performance thus far, we evaluated the states on a number of indicators. Our analysis emphasized indicators that tried to measure a state's momentum towards meeting its goals, and our full methodology can be found in an appendix on pg. 71 of this paper. Indicators were weighted in order to reflect their level of importance within our rating scheme. States could either receive a rating of "meeting expectations" or "not meeting expectations." The indicators include the following:

Has the U.S. Department of Education deemed the state's performance to be adequate? The Department of Education has the most granular sense of which states are doing well and which states are not. We defined a state's performance as satisfactory if it was not placed on a special "high risk" watch list. To determine which states had been placed on the list, we reviewed dozens of the Department of Education's Race to the Top amendment letters through February 2012.

Does the state have the support of key stakeholders? It's a well established political truism: The more support there is for an initiative the more likely it will be to succeed, and from the start RTT put a great deal of emphasis on collaboration. In our evaluation we gave credit to states that had the support of two key groups of stakeholders. First, a state received credit if it did not lose significant district support, and we did not give credit to any state that lost more than 15 percent of the students enrolled in participating districts. We also gave credit to states that maintained the public support of their teachers union, which we measured by looking at whether or not the state teacher's union had rejected a contract or if it had filed a lawsuit concerning an aspect of the state's RTT plan. For the first indicator we relied on data from the Department of Education. For the second indicator we relied on a survey of state teachers unions conducted in early 2012 by our staff.

State Spending Index. In an attempt to capture a state's momentum toward meeting its Race to the Top goals, we examined the rate at which a state was spending down its grant, adjusting the expenditures for the length of the time that the state had been working on implementation as well as the size of the grant. The data does not look at what exactly the states spent their money on nor does the data differentiate between states that may have front-loaded or back-loaded their grants. Moreover, there's sometimes a slight delay between state accounting and federal accounting procedures. Because of the limitations of this data, we did not evaluate the indicator against an external benchmark. That means a few things. First, we slotted districts into different evaluation levels even though in some cases the numerical value that separated the districts may not have been significant. It

also means that we assumed that some states would do well and others would do poorly. The data we used came from the Department of Education and was current as of February 2012.

Has the state piloted or implemented a new teacher-evaluation system? Each state, as part of its Race to the Top grant, had to develop a new teacher-evaluation system. In some states like New York, districts have been piloting the evaluations. In other states, the state agency is helping to lead the pilot. We relied on our research of state RTT programs for the data for this indicator.

Common Core Planning Index. Many states have not done enough to ensure that educators have the skills and knowledge to teach to the new Common Core standards. To evaluate states on this issue we relied on data from a report titled “Preparing for Change: A National Perspective on Common Core State Standards Implementation Planning” that was released by the EPE, or Editorial Projects in Education, Research Center and Education First Consulting earlier this year. The report looked at the degree to which states had plans to take specific implementation steps around three areas, including professional development, curriculum guides, and teacher-evaluation systems. Note that the “Preparing for Change” report did not examine the quality of the state plans or even the actions that the state was taking. It looked only at whether or not a state had a plan around this issue. The report was published in January of 2012.

Data Systems Index. For many years education leaders did not make investing in high-quality data systems a priority. Race to the Top moved to change that and emphasized the importance of high-quality data systems in providing information that can empower educators and the public. As a result we created a Data Systems Index relying on state responses to five questions from a 2011 state-by-state survey from the Data Quality Campaign, or DQC. The data includes five indicators including: is there a process by which researchers that are not employees of the state can propose their own studies for approval; which types of stakeholders have role-based access to student-level longitudinal data from the state longitudinal data system; which stakeholders does the state ensure access to longitudinal aggregate-level data from the state longitudinal data system; which aggregate-level reports are available on a state-owned public website; and are aggregate-level reports provided to state and/or local policymakers. Note that the data from DQC is not proxy data for state performance measures since the DQC survey data does not align exactly with the promises that the states made in their grants. We do believe, however, that this information helps to paint a picture of state

implementation of high-quality data systems and serves as a reasonable way to benchmark state performance in this area.

Does the state post monthly updates online? States are required to submit monthly implementation progress reports to the Department of Education, but they are not required by them to post their monthly reports online for the general public. But given the issues over transparency and communications—and the ease with which these reports can be made available—we included this data as additional information. It did not figure into our evaluations. To gather this data, we surveyed state officials and visited their SEA websites in early 2012. States only received credit if they posted detailed monthly updates on implementation progress in an easy-to-find location on their websites.

District of Columbia

By Isabel Owen

The District of Columbia has a unique education governance structure. It is made up of 54 charter local education agencies, or LEAs, and one noncharter LEA, the D.C. Public School system. Each LEA operates as an independent district, and DCPS is the largest LEA. The Race to the Top funding is administered through the Office of the State Superintendent of Education, or OSSE, which oversees the grant for all participating LEAs. OSSE “sets statewide policies, provides resources and support, and exercises accountability for all public education in D.C.”

Successes:

- In 2009 DCPS implemented a teacher-evaluation model based on student growth. Race to the Top allowed the District of Columbia to expand the initiative to charter LEAs.
- The District of Columbia created RTT Charter School Pipelines Grant, a competitive grant program to support teacher-residency programs in order to increase the number of highly effective teachers in charter LEAs.

Challenges:

- Observers are concerned about the District of Columbia’s ability to build capacity to implement the grant since OSSE’s RTT team is not fully staffed.
- Although all participating LEAs are implementing teacher and leader evaluations this year, OSSE is managing a review process of the evaluation models. Charter LEAs were delayed in submitting their plans.

Overall evaluation:

- The Center’s evaluation: meeting expectations.

Over the past few years, DCPS has been making headlines as a hotbed of education reform. It has had aggressive leaders in top positions, most notably Michelle Rhee, the former DCPS chancellor, and instituted bold reform policies. Indeed, DCPS is one of the first large urban school districts to implement a teacher-evaluation system based in part on student achievement. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan recently called the school system a “beacon of hope.”⁹

When the District of Columbia won a Race to the Top grant in August 2010, the funds were supposed to continue the momentum of DCPS initiated reforms, including the expansion of teacher and leader evaluations largely based on value-added measures, known as IMPACT. Reformers also saw Race to the Top as an opportunity for the city's school system and its charter local education agencies to share best practices and resources. "The opportunity now presented by Race to the Top comes at a crucial juncture for the District," the District of Columbia wrote in its application.¹⁰ At the very time when reform fatigue becomes a risk, [the District of Columbia] needs to accelerate efforts to maintain - and grow - its upward trajectory."

So far, the District of Columbia has seen a number of successes with its Race to the Top dollars, particularly in the continued development of the teacher-evaluation system. But the District of Columbia has struggled in other areas. A complete change in the District of Columbia's senior leadership, including a new mayor, led to a slowdown in the implementation of new reforms. In fact, according to District of Columbia officials, every person who worked on writing the RTT application at OSSE has subsequently left. Delays in hiring at the Office of the State Superintendent of Education have caused further delays, and OSSE has not been fully staffed at any point during the implementation of Race to the Top, say District of Columbia officials.

At the same time, some educators remain wary of the new evaluation system. The Washington Teacher's Union, for instance, did not support the District of Columbia's Race to the Top application because of the DCPS teacher-evaluation system component and it remains critical of the program, saying that it promotes winners and losers rather than cooperation. "This boutique program discourages teachers from working together," says Nathan Saunders, president of the union.¹¹

Still, the District is making progress in other areas. The most significant reforms are happening around the new teacher- and leader-evaluation systems. Participating charter local education agencies must use the same value-added measure as IMPACT. For reading and math teachers, in grades four to eight, 50 percent of the evaluation must be based on student achievement data, with the other 50 percent based on qualitative measures, such as observation rubrics, and the results must inform human capital decisions such as compensation and dismissal. Student growth measures must also be included in principal evaluations. The District of Columbia, however, does not require student achievement data to be included in evaluations in nontested grades and subjects.

Prior to Race to the Top, the 28 participating charter local education agencies did not have evaluation systems that met Office of the State Superintendent of Education's established RTT requirements. By using the federal funds, the participating charter LEAs are currently creating and implementing new evaluation models. OSSE is managing a review process to ensure the plans meet Race to the Top requirements. The effort has not gone very smoothly. The charter LEAs delayed submitting their plans to OSSE, and OSSE was slow in reviewing the plans, say officials.

The District of Columbia has also used RTT funds to create a Race to the Top Charter School Pipelines Grant, a competitive grant program to support teacher residency programs, with the goal of increasing the number of highly effective teachers. The programs train highly effective teachers, places them in charter schools, and facilitates their continued professional development, with the goal of increasing student achievement throughout the District of Columbia. District of Columbia officials say that building pipelines of effective teachers is the best way to address teacher quality. Last year, two grants were awarded.

Before winning Race to the Top, the District of Columbia had a longitudinal education data system, which collected a variety of data on students. RTT funds will help add new functionality to the system, and enable the District of Columbia to build an online data tool, which will make the most commonly requested data reports publicly accessible. OSSE's lack of capacity delayed the development of the data tool and the Department of Education approved an amendment shifting the timeline. District of Columbia officials say that the system should be up and running in 2012.

Race to the Top has not changed the District of Columbia's approach to school turnarounds. Rather, the grant is supplementing the turnaround work already in progress, and the District of Columbia had already identified its worst-performing schools before receiving the grant. So far RTT funds are used to add another layer of checks and balances and monitoring within OSSE.

The District of Columbia is changing its assessment system to align the program more closely with the Common Core. The Office of the State Superintendent of Education has published a detailed document that explains what used to be assessed and what will be assessed in the future. Reading assessments are currently aligned to the Common Core, and math tests will be aligned beginning in school year 2012-13. OSSE also provided professional development sessions on the Common Core during summer 2011, and it will provide additional training at the request of schools.

Using Race to the Top money, OSSE funded a grant to develop a video library of lessons aligned to Common Core standards, which will be posted online.

The District of Columbia made some big promises in its Race to the Top grant, including saying that it will “close the minority achievement gap by five percentage points per year.”¹² The District of Columbia has not been able to make such major academic strides previously and it’s unclear that it will be able to make them with RTT funds. But for now, the District of Columbia has largely done what it promised—maintain an upward trajectory—and only time will tell if its reforms actually improve student achievement.

Delaware

By Maureen Kelleher

Successes:

- Data coaches are in every school in the state and are working with teachers in the four core academic subjects, with some districts getting them to every teacher.
- All district principals are receiving coaching from the University of Delaware’s Academy for School Leadership, modeled after the New York City’s Leadership Academy.
- A new teacher-evaluation system is being piloted this year. The pilot will reward high-performing teachers with bonuses.

Challenges:

- The state still needs to create student growth measures for untested subjects and grades. Delaware expects to roll out a measure of student growth for core subjects next year but is still unsure whether it will be there for all teachers.
- A number of districts in the state have struggled with finding the necessary capacity to execute their ambitious reform plans.

Overall evaluation:

- The Center’s evaluation: meeting expectations.

Despite some short-term delays, Delaware has largely done what it set out to do in its initial months of Race to the Top implementation, and the state’s reform efforts currently reach into schools and classrooms across the state, changing the way teachers teach and students learn. One indicator of a state’s commitment to implementation is its budget, and the First State has already spent a good bit of its Race to the Top award—\$10.6 million of its \$119 million. That means that Delaware has spent a greater proportion of its RTT budget than any other winner so far.

While pushing for change, Delaware has largely managed to preserve the statewide unity that marked its application. Four new charter schools have opened since the state won Race to the Top and all have signed on to the work. And when the board of Delaware’s largest public school system, Christina School District, balked at moving teachers out of persistently low-performing schools, State Superintendent Lillian Lowery threatened to freeze its share of RTT money. Christina’s board

caved, and Lowery won national praise for bringing the renegade district to heel. In July the outgoing president of Delaware's largest teacher union joined the state's department of education to lead work on teacher evaluation, another indication of the union's commitment to the new system.

But a major question surfaced during year one: How quickly can the state develop and use growth models to weed-out persistently ineffective teachers, especially in untested grades and subjects? Originally Delaware had promised to define and use a measure of student growth in teacher evaluations beginning in the 2011-2012 school year. Delaware law, however, requires all teachers to be evaluated through the same process and the state currently lacks the student growth measures needed for untested grades and subjects.

In June 2011 Delaware requested an amendment to its plan that would hold the student growth measure harmless for one year, giving the state more time to develop student growth measures for untested grades and subjects before attaching negative consequences to the measures. (Teachers who score well on this year's evaluation, including the current student growth measure, will be eligible for bonuses if they transfer to high-need schools or accept leadership positions within their current buildings.) The amendment also proposed changes to how the state would calculate student growth.

Federal officials approved the amendment on the condition that Delaware develop a Technical Advisory Group to support its continuing work on teacher evaluation and to comment on the new scoring policy for Component Five, as the student growth measure is known. American Institutes for Research, one of the world's largest social science research organizations, is chairing the advisory group and work-groups including teachers are designing multiple measures of student growth in the untested areas. "Teachers have really taken ownership of this," Lowery observes.

"We think it's more important to do this work right and do it with our teachers than do it quickly and do it to our teachers," Deputy Superintendent Dan Cruce told an audience of about 250 state education leaders and policymakers at an October 2011 conference on Race to the Top sponsored by the Rodel Foundation, a key external partner in Delaware's education reform efforts.

Despite the state's efforts to bring teachers to the table in creating measures of student growth, union leaders continue to express concerns. "Is this an improvement model or a punishment model? There is fear [among teachers]. What have we

done to alleviate that fear?” asked Deb Stevens, director of instructional advocacy for the Delaware State Education Association during a panel discussion on the evaluation system held during the conference.

Later that day, Gov. Jack Markell (D) signaled that he expects the growth measure to be in full effect by 2012-13. He acknowledged, however, that the tools for untested grades and subjects may not be fully comparable to those being tested. “We have got to get this done next year,” he said during an interview. “I believe in the core areas we’ll have good pre- and post-tests. In the other areas we’ll have other tools. That’s not perfect but it’s where we’re going to be. From the perspective of treating everybody exactly the same it may not be ideal.”

By contrast, Delaware has made rapid progress on Common Core State Standards implementation and school turnarounds. In year one, the state developed transition guidelines for curriculum developers at all grade levels, plus model lessons and training modules for teachers. The state reports that 79 percent of its teachers received training on Common Core standards by June 2011. Four schools were identified for turnaround in the first few months of implementation, one more than was promised in the state’s RTT application.

The state has also moved quickly to get data coaches working with teachers. Since last fall, Delaware has had coaches on the ground in every school statewide teaching teachers how to use data in their classrooms during 90 minutes of required planning time. Where districts are struggling to implement the 90-minute planning time requirement, the state is offering both carrots and sticks. In January 2012 the Brandywine School District in northern New Castle County agreed to work with the state to find a way to increase its schools’ compliance with the 90-minute planning mandate rather than risk loss of its share of the grant funds. Meanwhile, other data coaches are helping principals manage their time and master an ambitious upgrade of its teacher-evaluation process.

Still, educators have to face broader capacity challenges as they implement Race to the Top. Chris Kohan, an assistant principal at John Dickinson High School just west of Wilmington, painted a vivid picture: “Professional Learning Committees (where data coaches work with teachers) are a great thing. It’s great the state is mandating them. I’m going to attend every PLC meeting in my building. That works until I also have a mandate to attend every [Individualized Education Plan] meeting for every [special education] student in my caseload. Then, how often do I have to observe my teachers? My Outlook calendar hates me. It says you can’t add that many things at the same time.”

Florida

By Elizabeth Duffrin

Successes:

- Every Race to the Top district has designed a locally negotiated teacher-evaluation process.
- A statewide committee that included educators selected a model for assigning value-added ratings to principals and teachers.
- All 71 of Florida's persistently low-achieving schools have implemented a school turnaround model.

Challenges:

- Recent state legislation mandating performance pay for newly hired teachers based on their performance on the evaluation systems has undermined teacher support for RTT reforms.
- Many question whether teachers will receive sufficient training on the new Common Core standards.

Overall evaluation:

- The Center's evaluation: not meeting expectations.

After narrowly missing its Race to the Top bid in the first round, Florida dramatically increased the number of local teachers unions signing onto its second bid. The effort paid off in a \$700 million grant, the largest awarded to any state. Just over a year into implementation, Florida has nearly all of its districts still on board but is well behind schedule on its original timetable, due mainly to the extra time needed to negotiate with a large number of outside contractors.

For the most part, observers don't doubt that Florida will succeed in carrying out its ambitious plan, which includes requiring districts to administer standardized tests in every major subject area in grades K through 12 including art, music, and physical education by 2013-14.¹³ But with staff time and money stretched thin, the question is how well they can do it. "We've got new curriculum, higher standards, new instructional practices, a new evaluation system with a value-added growth model, all of that is hitting us at the same time [that] resources are going backwards," says Joseph Joyner, superintendent of St. Johns County School

District in northeastern Florida, observing that RTT funds don't make up for the recent state budget cuts. "It's the perfect storm for making it very tough to implement anything substantial and of high quality."

Adding to the tension, the legislature enacted a law in March 2011 that undermined teacher-union support for the teacher-evaluation reforms that had been locally negotiated in RTT districts. Among other provisions, the law eliminates tenure for newly hired teachers and requires that salary adjustments for teachers hired after July 1, 2014 be based primarily on the results of their evaluations rather than experience or degrees.

While Florida Department of Education officials believe the law will contribute to the sustainability of merit pay reforms, others are less certain. The Florida Education Association, or FEA, filed a lawsuit charging that the law violates collective bargaining rights under the state constitution. Association President Andy Ford says the legislation undermined local innovation and teacher buy-in. "It destroyed the morale around Race to the Top."

In November, Florida won federal approval to delay two of its projects.¹⁴ The state had requested a two-year extension on awarding grants to professional organizations that will develop reliable ways to measure student growth in noncore courses, such as music. It also asked to delay an effort to expand principals and teacher preparation in hard-to-staff subjects. Florida reports these and other delays largely because the state is relying heavily on outside contractors and has needed additional time to negotiate with them. The selection of a vendor to create a new inventory of test items, for instance, is running behind schedule, according to Kris Ellington, deputy commissioner for accountability research and measurement. Districts will use the new inventory of test items in school year 2013-14 for new exams in the core academic subjects and Spanish that are not covered by state tests. "We will have to put it in warp drive to get it all done," she says.

Of the 69 Florida districts and independent schools that originally signed-up for Race to the Top, 65 are still participating. The districts that left the initiative were three relatively small districts and the Florida School for The Deaf & The Blind, all of which received limited allocations. The remaining districts enroll 93 percent of the state's public school students.

Florida Department of Education officials say they consider the new teacher-evaluation systems, each locally negotiated, to be the state's biggest accomplish-

ment thus far. Districts were required to meet state criteria and were encouraged to model their evaluations after one developed by Robert Marzano, CEO of Marzano Research Laboratory in Englewood, Colorado, which draws on research about the teaching practices that lead to higher student achievement. State education department staff and national experts also provided technical assistance.

Districts were supposed to begin using the evaluations by mid-October 2011. That left little time to train administrators how to use them, observes Jeffrey Solochek, an education reporter with the *Tampa Bay Times*, which serves the Tampa Bay area. “Only a handful of districts feel like they’re prepared to do that,” he says. “Most feel like they’re rushing.”

As elsewhere in the country, the value-added portion of the teacher evaluations is the most controversial. Ford, FEA president, says that teachers don’t feel the formula is fair or even understandable.

Beginning this school year, 50 percent of Florida teachers’ individual ratings will be based on their value-added scores averaged over three years. (Districts had the option of factoring in two previous years’ test results or beginning with this year’s results. Value-added scores will only count for 40 percent of a teacher’s rating if less than three years of data is available.) Teachers of grades and subjects for which tests have not yet been developed will be judged this year based on schoolwide scores, which many teachers also find unfair, according to Ford.

Some of Florida’s early accomplishments are less controversial. All of the state’s 71 persistently low-achieving schools have selected a turnaround model, although five of those schools are in districts that are no longer participating in RTT. Regional offices also opened 74 new positions to provide on-site professional development to the low-achieving schools.

The state has also been moving on implementing the Common Core, and it held a two-day state training last summer for representatives from 64 districts on the new standards in kindergarten, which teachers began using in 2011-12. Still, finding time and money to train all teachers will be a challenge, superintendents say. Between the 2011-12 school year and the 2014-15 school year, the state will not only roll out Common Core standards in math and language arts, but will implement new state standards in all other major subjects: science, social studies, world language, arts, health, and physical education.

Even with over \$70 million in Race to the Top money, years of budget cuts have left some districts like Miami-Dade County Public Schools without sufficient time or funding for professional development, says Superintendent Alberto Carvalho. Finding enough well qualified people to lead the training is also a challenge, he adds. “That said, we’re going to push ahead with the resources we have.” Districts also have to find money to create and administer standardized tests in grade levels and subject areas not covered by state tests, including social studies, foreign language, art, music, and physical education. The goal is to be able to assign a value-added rating to 80 percent of Florida teachers based on their students’ standardized test results by 2013-14 school year.

To aid districts in creating exams, the state used Race to the Top funds to award grants to four districts to develop exams in hard-to-test subjects like music, art, and physical education that will then be made available statewide. RTT funds are also paying for an item test bank for interim assessments that will also include items for end-of-the-year exams in core subjects and Spanish. But still, at least some of the test creation—and all of the administration—will be left up to districts themselves.

“Even in my own district which is relatively large, I’m concerned about finding time and money for assessments in all of the areas,” says Superintendent Peg Smith of Volusia County Schools in east central Florida. She believes that collaborative efforts across districts might ease the load. “It will be very difficult for small districts,” she adds.

What’s more, funding performance pay for teachers and administrators in this economic climate may simply prove undoable for some districts, she says. “If we don’t have any money for raises at all, how are we going to implement it?”

Florida Department of Education officials acknowledged that time and budget constraints presented a challenge but felt confident that the state could carry out the plan effectively. “Florida is a big state and it’s a short timeline,” says Mary Jane Tappen, the department’s deputy chancellor for curriculum, instruction and student services. “But that’s not to say that it can’t be done or that we won’t be successful.”

Georgia

By Elizabeth Duffrin

Successes:

- Georgia is developing a new teacher- and administrator-evaluation system that streamlines a previously field-tested system and includes a value-added measure and surveys of students, parents, and colleagues.
- The state is implementing school intervention models in the state's 39 persistently low-achieving schools and held summer leadership training for all participating districts.

Challenges:

- Teachers remain wary of the new evaluation system, particularly the value-added component, and the state has yet to earn full buy-in.
- Providing sufficient training for teachers on the new Common Core standards is a concern.

Overall evaluation:

- The Center's evaluation: meeting expectations.

When Georgia won its \$400 million grant in August 2010, the Republican nominee for state schools superintendent, who had initially opposed Race to the Top, quickly promised his cooperation if elected. Since taking office in January 2011, State Superintendent John Barge has kept his pledge. "He seems to have found the Race to the Top faith," one journalist quips.

But due in part to the changes in state leadership—the governorship changed hands in the same election—Georgia is a year or more behind on some of the major goals of its original proposal.¹⁵ So far, Georgia reports that it is keeping pace with its revised schedule¹⁶ and has reached some major milestones, including the adoption of a new teacher- and principal-evaluation system this fall.

But the speed demanded by the federal grant may come at a cost. Many teachers remain uneasy with Georgia's new evaluation system, which was piloted beginning in January in the 26 participating districts. Part of the issue is communications, as some teachers are unfamiliar with the new systems. Given tight deadlines, many also ques-

tion whether teachers will receive sufficient training on the rigorous Common Core standards, which are scheduled to roll out beginning in the 2012-13 school year.

Georgia has had issues with executing state-led reforms in the past and some point to the unsuccessful implementation of a more rigorous high school math curriculum that the state adopted several years ago. The curriculum is still under fire from both educators and parents, observes Cathy Henson, president of the nonprofit Georgia School Council Institute and a former chair of the state school board. “Where it fell apart is, they didn’t invest enough in teacher training.”

The development of a new teacher and administrator evaluation system is one of Georgia’s main accomplishments thus far under Race to the Top. Committees that included teachers, education association leaders, business leaders, and others worked to streamline the performance criteria and in December, the state approved a “value-added” model to judge the contribution of individual teachers and administrators to student test scores.

In addition, one committee helped design surveys to measure teacher effectiveness by gathering feedback from students, parents, and colleagues. The surveys will be field-tested this school year and will count toward individual teacher ratings in 2012-13 school year. Evaluations will be used to determine teacher and administrator pay beginning in 2013-14.

While the committees included educators, many teachers remain suspicious of the new value-added measures, which will count for 50 percent of evaluation ratings for math and language arts teachers in grades 4 and up.

The lack of more widespread support from teachers for the new evaluation system could prove an obstacle to winning their buy-in down the line, says Maureen Downey, who writes an education blog for the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. A prior attempt in Georgia to pass legislation that would have included student performance in teacher evaluations met with strong resistance, she recalls. “Teachers really rose up in opposition to that.”

Georgia has hit a number of its other goals under the grant. These include summer leadership training for 258 school and district administrators, the hiring of teachers for hard-to-staff schools through programs such as Teach for America and The New Teacher Project, and PSAT testing for high school sophomores. The state also opened two new regional high schools for students at risk of dropout and cre-

ated new online professional development courses for math, science, and technology teachers offered through Georgia Institute of Technology.

The state is running behind on some significant pieces of its plan, however, due in part to changes in state-level leadership. In July Georgia received federal approval to revise its schedule.¹⁷ The changes include piloting a new teacher- and administrator-evaluation system a year later than originally anticipated. As a result, school districts will hold off until 2012-13 to begin using evaluation results to make decisions about retaining staff. Courses on teaching the new Common Core standards were also delayed from June 2011 until August 2012 after the Georgia Department of Education decided to hire in-house staff to lead them rather than contracting out.

Through its Race to the Top plan, Georgia is building on some successful education reform efforts under a previous governor and school superintendent. The Georgia Department of Education, for instance, had a strong track record for intervening in persistently low-achieving schools. Of the 91 schools that received an in-depth needs assessment from a state team since 2006-07, 74 percent have made federal performance targets and 51 percent have come off the state's needs improvement list. The state will continue to provide extra support to persistently low-achieving schools with onsite monitoring, professional development and classroom coaching, and other supports.

Still there are challenges. Georgia's adoption of Common Core standards in 2010 is a continuation of an effort to strengthen state standards in all subjects that began in 2002 after an independent audit found them lacking in rigor. The revised standards, rolled out between 2004 and 2009, suffered a rocky implementation due largely to insufficient teacher training. In that instance, the state trained representatives from each district on a new high school math curriculum and then charged them with training teachers at their own schools. The so-called train-the-trainer approach "resulted in a really, really inconsistent training all across the state," says Herbert Garrett, executive director of the Georgia School Superintendents Association. "There continued to be massive pushback by teachers, lots of complaints by parents and kids, and inconsistent evidence from test scores as to whether the training had made any difference at all."

For its Race to the Top initiative, Georgia decided to take a different approach. Now the regional trainings on reading and math standards at each grade level will be streamed directly to faculty across the state in live, interactive sessions and videotaped for future reference. Teachers can also take online courses individually on

their own time. And the state's 16 regional educational service agencies, or RESAs, will provide follow-up training for school and district staff.

While an improvement, the approach still has some potential pitfalls, according to Henson of the Georgia School Council Institute. "Some [RESAs] are very competent and some are not so you're going to have that very inconsistent quality trickling down to the local level."

Some districts are large enough to rely on their own staff for training. The problem is finding the time, explains Ginger Starling, RTT administrator for the Muscogee County School District. The school calendar has been cut by six days with a loss in state funding, she explained, teachers don't want to come to training on weekends or furlough days, and parents object when teachers take time away from their classrooms. "It's a hard act to balance," she says.

Sustaining RTT reforms after the federal grant ends will prove to be another challenge, adds Teresa MacCartney, Race to the Top director for the Georgia Department of Education. Some projects are designed to promote sustainability, such as online professional development and classroom resources supporting the Common Core, she observes. Others, such as recruitment programs for hard-to-staff schools will be expensive to maintain, as will pay-for-performance initiatives. "Anything around merit pay will always be a funding issue."

Hawaii

By Jeremy Ayers

Successes:

- Hawaii increased the rigor of its graduation requirements to make the state's college and career diploma the default requirement for all high school students.
- Hawaii hired coaches to help educators use data to improve instruction and created a bank of test items that allows every educator to create their own classroom assessments, aligned with standards, to measure student progress.

Challenges:

- State budget cuts and teacher contract disputes delayed implementation of several RTT promises, including lengthening the school year, rewarding teachers who improve student learning, and securing teacher buy-in for evaluation reforms.
- The U.S. Department of Education labeled the state a “high-risk” grantee for making inadequate progress. This limits the state's access to funds.

Overall evaluation:

- The Center's evaluation: not meeting expectations.

Few observers thought that Hawaii would win a Race to the Top grant. When the Aloha State proved to be a winner, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan was reportedly “surprised and upset” and his staff was in a “near panic.”¹⁸ But Duncan stood by the recommendation of his peer reviewers and the state received \$75 million in funds, beating out other well-known reform states such as Louisiana and Colorado.

Now, a year into the program, the state can point to some clear and important victories. Using federal dollars the state has improved graduation requirements, broadened access to early childhood programs, and boosted the ability of educators to use student data. “Race to the Top has ensured our state keeps moving and that we keep our promises,” says Stephen Schatz, assistant superintendent for strategic reform at the Hawaii Department of Education.

But the state has struggled to deliver on all of its promises, leading the Department of Education to put Hawaii on “high-risk” status, limiting the state's autonomy over funds until greater progress is made.¹⁹ The problems largely stem from a labor

dispute over state budget cuts, not RTT per se. Still, the dispute has delayed or diminished RTT reforms, including expanding the school day or year, rewarding teachers who improve student achievement, and securing union support for a new teacher-evaluation system.

The most recent development occurred on January 19, 2012, when teachers rejected a proposed new contract, the second contract to be rejected. Gov. Neil Abercrombie (D) responded by pledging to use “all management, administrative, legislative, and legal tools we have at our disposal to implement an evaluation system ...”²⁰ He has since introduced legislation to do so and has worked with the state board of education to pass policies that help execute Race to the Top plans. The Hawaii State Teachers Association, for its part, embarked on a statewide listening tour, but at the time of publishing this report has not yet submitted a counteroffer to the state. State officials claim that a collective bargaining agreement is not required to implement most of the reforms, like a new evaluation system, but it is required for instituting others such as a new performance pay program.²¹ In late February teachers finally ratified a contract to extend learning time in low-performing schools, touted as a breakthrough by state officials.²²

Despite highly visible setbacks, the state rightfully claims some key policy successes. Most notably, Hawaii increased the rigor of graduation requirements, mandating all students earn a college and career diploma beginning with the class of 2016—two years earlier than planned.²³ And every school now has access to an online bank of classroom assessments aligned to Common Core standards. Teachers and principals can pull questions from the bank to measure student progress and they receive customized data reports of the results.

Hawaii has also taken a number of important steps to improve teacher quality. Using RTT funds, the state has created recruitment incentives to increase the number of highly qualified teachers in hard-to-staff subjects like math and science. It adopted new teacher induction standards, albeit one year late, that are considered “high-quality” by the New Teacher Center, a national teacher organization.²⁴ And every school in the state has a data coach that works with educators to improve instruction.

Further, the state has taken some steps to implement a next-generation teacher-evaluation system. According to state officials, all twelve low-performing schools in the state have adopted a new teacher-observation system as part of evaluation reforms. Hawaii has also trained school leaders to administer the observation

forms and teachers are beginning to be observed. Almost 50 new schools will join the pilot in the 2012-13 school year, which is more than the state anticipated.

The truth is that Hawaii has fulfilled many of its Race to the Top commitments that do not require a collective bargaining agreement to move forward, including piloting the new evaluation system. “In some ways we are behind schedule, but we are not off track,” says Tammi Chun, education advisor to Gov. Abercrombie.

Yet Chun acknowledges, as do all observers, that reforms are only sustainable when they have widespread support by teachers and administrators. For their part, teachers appear to have mixed feelings about many of the reforms, including the new evaluation system. “I think evaluations can help us improve,” says one teacher coach in a low-performing school, “but not all of my fellow teachers agree.” Other teachers, the coach says, are concerned about the fairness of the evaluations, especially if there is no statewide test for their grade or subject.

Despite early successes, Hawaii has had issues implementing other aspects of its Race to the Top plan, which led the U.S. Department of Education to place Hawaii in “high-risk status.”²⁵ The state must now receive federal approval for future RTT spending decisions, and federal officials will visit Hawaii in late March for an onsite review. “They are in danger of losing their resources,” Duncan says. “This hasn’t been a great year for Hawaii.”²⁶

The controversy between the state and the union is not about Race to the Top necessarily but teacher compensation, which has been complicated by steep budget cuts. “The contract dispute is separate but related to Race to the Top,” says Alvin Nagasako, executive director of the Hawaii State Teachers Association, or HSTA. “I want to know when teachers will receive the supports, mentoring, and assessments they need to implement these new evaluations systems.”

The labor dispute is not to blame for all delays, however. The state has the ability to connect student achievement data to graduates of teacher-preparation programs, but it has not shared that information with programs or made it public. Hawaii planned to finance alternative certification programs that would provide clinical, residency-based training to candidates coming into the profession through nontraditional routes. But the state teacher policy board did not approve the original plan, setting the state back nearly a year. And the state failed for several months to gain teacher support for universally increasing learning time in low-performing schools.

Critics have alternately criticized and praised Hawaii for its implementation of the Common Core standards. Last year, Hawaii introduced the new standards in grades K-2 and a few courses in high school, waiting for a full roll out until the 2014-15 school year when new college- and career-ready assessments are in place. Chun reports that Hawaii's progress is "ahead of other states" when it comes to the new standards. But Nagasako disagrees, saying teachers need more time and training to familiarize themselves with the standards before being evaluated on them.

In addition, Hawaii's challenges have been further complicated by a lack of communication, a problem acknowledged by state officials. One community advocate expressed desire for more proactive communication from the state education agency. "A lot of their work is not visible to the public, and they have historically had a problem with community outreach," says Cheri Nakamura, director of the Hui for Excellence in Education, a nonprofit coalition of parent and community organizations. Others say that the state has not done enough to change classroom practice or share information with educators. "I know very little about Race to the Top," said one charter school teacher, "I was hoping you could tell me more about it."

In the end, only time will tell if Hawaii will meet all of its RTT obligations. For now state officials, union leaders, and educators express commitment to keep their promises. "We wanted to cross the Race to the Top finish line side-by-side with the HSTA," claims Gov. Abercrombie, "Make no mistake we will cross that finish line."²⁷ From the union perspective, Nagasako offers, "I think we can reach an agreement, and we want to move forward on Race to the Top."

Of course, the difference between wanting and doing is what makes the work of reform an uphill climb. "We know that transformation work is hard," says Kathryn Matayoshi, the state superintendent of education. "We need to run a little faster and push a little harder."²⁸ If desire is any indication, the state is headed in the right direction. But clearly there are still significant promises to keep—and challenges to address—in the months and years ahead.

Massachusetts

By Theodora Chang

Successes:

- State Board approved a regulatory framework on teacher evaluations, which is the first step in piloting teacher evaluation systems in the lowest-performing schools and early adopter districts in the 2011-12 school year.
- Twenty-two of the 35 lowest-performing schools made test-score gains in the 2010-11 school year.

Challenges:

- The state pushed back most of its data systems expansion and development timelines due to hiring challenges and problems with procurement.

Overall evaluation:

- The Center's evaluation: meeting expectations.

Massachusetts's Race to the Top mentality might be described as “slow and steady wins the race,” with one important caveat: When compared to the rest of the RTT winners, Massachusetts started out ahead of the pack.

The fact is that the state had already established a relatively solid foundation of education reforms when it won \$250 million in the second round of Race to the Top. Indeed, the Bay State has a long history of standards-based reform, and students in the state regularly score at the top in national tests. To become competitive for RTT—and build on its reforms—the state passed a law known as the “Achievement Gap Act” in January 2010, which gave the state more power to intervene in turnaround schools, create in-district charter schools, and increase the number of successful charter schools in the lowest-performing districts.²⁹

According to Mary Jo Meisner and Elizabeth Pauley of The Boston Foundation, a community foundation based in the city, “We’ve started the reform agenda in the schools and districts that struggle the most, but the agenda is far more ambitious and will ultimately redesign the building blocks of education in every school and district in the Commonwealth, including who teaches, how they are prepared and supported, and what they teach.” For Massachusetts, in other words, Race to the

Top is a way to build upon an existing foundation to reform the entire education system in the state.

The Bay State's Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System, or MCAS, is arguably the most rigorous testing system in the nation and a number of other states have modeled their systems after it. After winning its Race to the Top grant, Massachusetts began working on implementing the Common Core and aligning its assessments with the new standards. The state worked with teachers to develop and pilot model curriculum units and performance assessments. The state also added pre-kindergarten standards that were not part of the Common Core and held workshops around the state to explain the new framework. Aside from delays in developing formative assessments for English Language Arts and math, and in expanding the existing digital library for teachers, the state's standards and assessments projects are progressing as planned.

Prior to winning Race to the Top funds, the state had a relatively weak approach to teacher evaluation. While Massachusetts collected data on student growth by comparing the change in a student's MCAS performance from year to year relative to his or her academic peers, the data were not included in teacher evaluations in most districts. This value-added information was also not available for all subjects and grade levels. In its RTT application, the state promised to expand the model and include multiple measures of student growth in every educator's evaluation.

Last year, the Massachusetts State Board of Education approved a new regulatory framework for educator-evaluation systems, and the evaluation systems are currently being implemented in the lowest-performing schools and 11 early adopter districts. All districts participating in Race to the Top will implement an evaluation system in school year 2012-13, and all other districts will implement an evaluation system by school year 2013-14.

Yet the debate over the new teacher-evaluation system is hardly over. The Massachusetts chapter of the education advocacy group, Stand for Children, collected voter signatures for a ballot measure that would expand the authority of the state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to include the approval of evaluation plans instead of just reviewing them, and prioritize teacher performance over seniority.³⁰ The Massachusetts Teachers Association filed a lawsuit in January 2012 to keep the measure off the ballot, and the controversy will likely continue until the State Supreme Court takes up the lawsuit.³¹ Under Massachusetts law, the measure could also move forward if the state legislature

decides to turn the ballot initiative into a bill or Stand for Children collects an additional 10,000 signatures.³²

State officials admit that Massachusetts did miss some smaller milestones. The state, for instance, postponed the development of a teacher career ladder and online competency-based special education and English as a Second Language courses until next year, along with a new support network for principals serving in high-need schools. Due to delays in hiring staff and procuring technological systems, several key professional development projects are also being postponed by one or two years.

Massachusetts has a long history of working on issues of school turnaround. From 2001-2006, the state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education identified and funneled resources to chronically low-performing schools, but it found that it needed to work intensively with districts to translate those resources into improvement. So in 2008 it created a framework for providing intensive school turnaround support and classified persistently underperforming schools into tiers to better target assistance.

Massachusetts is focusing its Race to the Top turnaround efforts on the lowest-achieving schools, or bottom-tier schools. And while there have been some project delays, the state is building upon its previous work and making measurable progress in student achievement. In the 2010-11 school year, 22 of the 35 lowest-achieving schools made combined gains of 5 percentage points or more among students scoring “proficient” or above in English Language Arts and math, and several schools had gains of 10 percentage points to 20 percentage points.

According to Carrie Conaway, Director of Planning, Research, and Evaluation at the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, the expansion of data systems was the main area where the state struggled to meet proposed timelines. Massachusetts had already developed an Education Data Warehouse, or EDW, to maintain state- and local-level data. In its Race to the Top application, Massachusetts planned to expand features of the EDW and customize role-specific dashboards, integrate relevant data across agencies, and include early childhood data. The U.S. Department of Education approved amendments to move back timelines, again due to hiring challenges and problems with procuring technological systems.

In the coming months, Massachusetts faces a critical test as its lowest-performing schools and early adopter districts pilot the new teacher-evaluation system. It

will also face the challenge of creating a strong default teacher-evaluation model for districts that choose not to customize their own evaluation system. Overall, it seems that the state wisely prioritized and completed the more challenging projects, and it should be able to make stronger progress on the delayed data systems projects in the next year.

In order to achieve its objectives, Massachusetts will have to continue its “slow and steady wins the race” approach and keep its eye on the finish line.

Maryland

By Theodora Chang

Successes:

- Maryland is largely on track with its commitments to standards and assessments reforms and school turnaround work.
- The state was able to put its teacher-evaluation system pilot back on track in spite of early delays.

Challenges:

- The state's Council for Educator Effectiveness was not able to complete its recommendations on new teacher-evaluations systems, which has the potential to delay full implementation.
- Hiring issues and contracting and procurement delays led the state to push back most of its data systems timeframes.

Overall evaluation:

- The Center's evaluation: meeting expectations.

Most states might understandably struggle with carrying out significant education projects or initiating new reforms after losing a key leader. Maryland, however, has barely missed a beat in its implementation of Race to the Top so far, even after the retirement of Dr. Nancy Grasmick, the state's superintendent of schools. Grasmick led the department for 20 years and was one of the key architects of its RTT application.

Maryland was able to pick up the slack in part because it developed some well-organized structures to promote effective communication and project implementation.³³ After receiving its RTT award, the state created a Race to the Top Office within its Division of Academic Reform and Innovation to manage all of the projects. The office is headed by the assistant state superintendent, who oversees several implementation teams that meet regularly to troubleshoot and discuss progress, and has clear lines of responsibility for every project. The top officials on the current implementation team were deeply involved in the Race to the Top application process from the start and are all continuing on in their roles.

This continuity has helped the state in other areas and Maryland seems to be hitting its stride on standards and assessments. For instance, it is progressing on schedule with initiatives to develop formative assessment systems, both in terms of independent state projects and projects that are a part of the 26-state Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, or PARCC, that Maryland has joined. The state requested small amendments to standards and assessment projects that deal primarily with funding reallocations, and it is making a concerted effort to prioritize the development of STEM curriculum materials and professional development.

The state has long been working with districts to help them implement new and revised academic standards. A few years ago, the state developed an Online Instructional Toolkit to help teachers implement new curricula for their classrooms and the program was widely used by educators around the state. State officials say that the work on the toolkit set the stage for the state's adoption of the Common Core Standards and the state will expand the toolkit using RTT funds. Maryland also offered 11 Educator Effectiveness Academies during the summer of 2011 to deliver information on the Common Core Standards to teams from each school. Participants in the program received extensive training on the Common Core Standards and were expected to bring that information back to their schools and share it with their colleagues.

But of the four reform areas prioritized by Race to the Top, school improvement seems to be the one area where Maryland has the greatest institutional advantage. In 2008 Maryland's State Department of Education created the Breakthrough Center, an internal state agency operation that coordinates and delivers targeted support to low-performing Title I schools across the state. In the 2010-11 school year, the Breakthrough Center intensified its efforts to support the lowest-performing schools in the state. In addition to providing tailored improvement strategies, the agency also conducts audits and uses the results to prioritize technical assistance.

Still, the state ran into stumbling blocks, including developing and implementing an educator-evaluation system. In its original plan the state's Council for Educator Effectiveness was supposed to make recommendations for evaluation system design in December 2010, and seven LEAs would pilot the system from January 2011 through June 2012.

Instead, the council requested a timeline extension because it had trouble reaching agreement among all of the participants, and the seven LEAs are piloting from

September 2011 through June 2012.³⁴ By shortening the piloting timeframe the state has the opportunity to stay on track with the rest of its evaluation systems work, and all of the participating districts are slated to pilot new evaluation systems in the 2012-13 school year.

The shortened timeframe, however, allows less room for error on an initiative that is already very complex. “The new evaluation process requires that you really look at what’s happening in the classroom and define what good instruction looks like, and that can be hard for administrators who are not trained to do this work,” said Prince George’s County Superintendent William Hite.³⁵ Aside from the evaluation systems pilot, the other projects related to teachers and leaders have been progressing on track.

After clearing most of its initial hurdles, Maryland seems poised to lead as it heads into another year of implementation. State and local officials admit that they will need to focus more of their efforts on data systems projects. According to Assistant State Superintendent Jim Foran, many of the state’s data systems deadlines were pushed back because of hiring issues and procurement delays for contracting services or technology products.³⁶ For instance, the state delayed the creation and implementation of adaptive computer-based tests in high schools, and expanded the development of a test item bank into a broader initiative with a longer timeframe.

The state will also need to closely monitor local education agencies’ progress on teacher-evaluation system development in pilot districts. It’s clear that the state is nimble enough to adjust timelines and complete many of its milestones in spite of roadblocks; what remains to be seen is whether it is able to hit the mark with the accuracy and quality that it promised.

North Carolina

By Elizabeth Duffrin

Successes:

- This fall, 800 teachers met to give input on new student assessments that will launch next year in grades and subjects not already covered by state standardized tests. The new assessments will count toward the value-added portion of the new teacher-evaluation system.
- Three regional leadership academies have launched to prepare aspiring principals to turnaround low-achieving schools.

Challenges:

- The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction will need to ensure that the more than 50 new student assessments are both affordable and reliable enough to count toward teacher ratings.
- The North Carolina Teacher Corps a program that recruits and trains graduates from North Carolina colleges to teach in high needs school, will begin a year late.

Overall evaluation:

- The Center's evaluation: meeting expectations.

Since winning \$400 million in 2010, North Carolina has faced less controversy over its Race to the Top reforms than have many other states.

Compared to elsewhere, teachers in North Carolina have had a more subdued reaction to the use of value-added scores as part of their evaluations. Part of the reason is that the state has long produced value-added scores for teachers to inform their professional development. Also the state earned buy-in from educators when it recruited 800 teachers to help in designing the new assessments that will count towards their ratings. The innovative design of the new assessments, their sheer number, and the speed at which they need to be developed, however, pose one of the largest challenges for the state in successfully carrying out its Race to the Top plan.³⁷

Prior to winning a RTT grant, North Carolina had begun rolling out a new evaluation system for teachers and principals. The state is now in the process of selecting

a value-added model to add to that system. There is, however, a difference between North Carolina and most other RTT states where the value-added score counts for 50 percent of a teachers' evaluation. North Carolina will consider the value-added score as one of six standards on which a teacher must meet proficiency.

The equal weighting of the value-added scores with the other standards, the fact that the state has produced value-added scores for teachers for many years, and the absence of a statewide plan to tie teacher pay to evaluations has made the reform less contentious in North Carolina than elsewhere, says Sheri Strickland, president of the North Carolina Association of Educators. Prior to Race to the Top, only some districts used the value-added scores for evaluation—their main purpose was to identify strengths and weaknesses to better target professional development. “Teachers have had access to the [value-added] information for awhile,” Strickland notes. “They understand how useful the information can be.”

To be sure, the state has fallen behind on several projects and has received federal permission to revise its original timeline.³⁸ Some of the delays relate to Web-based programs. An online service for schools that provides classroom assessments and analyzes student data will launch in 2013-14, a year late, because building the system will take longer and cost more than anticipated. The launch of new online math, science, and engineering and technology courses for students are also behind by more than a year due to operational changes and a hiring delay. The state won approval to move the launch date from January 2011 to January 2012 but will need to request a further extension, according to an official.

Some of the other delays relate to changes in implementation. The North Carolina Teacher Corps, for instance, a program that recruits and trains graduates from North Carolina colleges to teach in high needs schools, will begin service a year late in 2012-13. Nonetheless, the program will recruit the same number of teachers but will do it over two years instead of three. The delay came after the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction decided to design the project in-house rather than hiring an outside contractor.

The state has made better progress on other pieces of its plan. This past summer, the state led a series of institutes for representatives from every school district to plan professional development for teachers on new state standards, including Common Core standards in math and language arts. At the district level, professional development on the Common Core standards is taking place during some of the eight days the state has built into the school schedule for teacher

training. “It’s the most well organized effort from the state I’ve ever seen,” says James Causby, executive director of the North Carolina School Superintendents’ Association, of the training, adding that the online resources provided by the state on the Common Core standards are “outstanding.” Still he says finding time for professional development will become more difficult in 2012-13 after a legislative decision to drop the built-in training days from eight to three.

The state is also moving ahead on efforts to turn around its persistently low-achieving schools. As of last school year, all 118 had implemented a school turnaround model. This summer the state organized an induction program and mentoring for new teachers at these schools and also launched three regional leadership academies to prepare aspiring principals to lead turnaround efforts.

Prior to Race to the Top, North Carolina had some success in turning around troubled schools. Half of the 66 high schools in the state’s turnaround initiative, for example, are now scoring at 70 percent proficient or better on state tests compared to none in 2006. With RTT money the state will be able to provide more intensive supports at the school, such as more frequent coaching for school leadership teams.

Leadership is the key to school turnaround, says Wake County Superior Court Judge Howard Manning, who oversees a consent decree to improve education in five high-poverty North Carolina counties. “Unless you’ve got a great principal, you’re not going to be able to move that faculty. That’s just the bottom line.” He says that the staff running Race to the Top “knows what needs to be done” but will probably have more success turning around elementary schools than the remaining persistently low-achieving high schools because older students are simply so far behind.

In another major effort, the state organized a four-day meeting for 800 teachers from across the state to plan and design over 50 assessments for subjects and grades not covered by state tests, including science, social studies, high school courses, music, art, and physical education.

A vendor hired by the state will use teachers’ recommendations to create the assessments, which will then be reviewed by the teachers. The goal is to provide virtually every teacher an individual value-added score beginning in 2012-13 based on an objective measure of student learning. The assessments may be in a range of formats other than pen-and-pencil tests such as an open-ended essay or an art portfolio scored against certain criteria.

Causby of the superintendents' association, says that superintendents have “a lot of concern about the validity” of the new assessments, which will be scored locally rather than by the state. For one, he wonders—“Is there adequate time to test them and make sure they are valid?”

Strickland with the Association of Educators, says that while challenging to design well, the new assessments will be a more meaningful way to evaluate student learning than fill-in-the-bubble tests. “The tests that we’ve been using did not get to the creativity and higher-order thinking skills that we want.”

Adam Levinson, North Carolina’s Race to the Top director, acknowledges that the Department of Public Instruction will have to work hard at winning public support for the new tests in light of recent anti-testing backlash. In March, the state legislature eliminated four statewide high school end-of-course exams citing the expense, the poor quality of the exams, and excessive time spent on testing.

“The educator public is one challenge and then for the public in general we have to work against the notion that this is a lot of additional testing,” says Levinson, explaining that the new assessments can take the place of a regular classroom exam. “I think how [well] we communicate is going to determine our chances of overcoming [that fear].”

New York

By Ulrich Boser

Successes:

- The state has been building capacity around the Common Core, including a new collaborative, online platform for teachers.
- The state has created a School Innovation Fund to help ensure that all low-performing schools—not just the ones in the lowest tier—get support.

Challenges:

- Implementation of a next-generation teacher-evaluation system has suffered delays due to a lawsuit and other communications challenges
- Some educators remain very wary of using student achievement to evaluate the performance of teachers and principals.
- Some districts, including New York City, have had difficulty coming to agreement with their teacher's union on the details of a new teacher-evaluation system.

Overall evaluation:

- The Center's evaluation: meeting expectations.

Race to the Top has not been easy for New York State. Even before the state applied for the grant, policymakers spent months negotiating legislative efforts aimed at improving its chances in the competition. Eventually, the state legislature approved an ambitious plan that would allow local school districts to use student test scores as one part of a teacher's evaluation as well as increase the number of charter schools in the state.

The Empire State's early efforts paid off, and New York won approximately \$700 million in federal funds, coming in second-place in the second round of the competition. But implementation has proven to be more difficult than many imagined. Last year, a judge knocked down a part of the regulations governing the new teacher evaluations and there's growing concern among educators over using student assessments to evaluate a teacher's performance. The state has also struggled with implementing certain aspects of its next-generation data systems.

“If implementation is everything, New York is an open question. Hearts and minds are not necessarily following the legislation. People are still not feeling all that excited about the work,” explains Joe Williams, executive director of Democrats for Education Reform and a close observer of the state’s reform efforts.

Momentum for reform seems to be picking up, though, and state education officials and the state teachers’ union reached a new agreement on a next-generation evaluation system in February. The state also scored a number of early and important successes, which continue to pay dividends. In an effort to build capacity around the Common Core, for example, the state launched a collaborative, online platform for educators. Called EngageNY, the site includes lesson plans, professional development guides, and short videos all dedicated to helping educators teach to the new standards.³⁹ Using federal RTT funding, the state has also created the Network Team Institute, which is a group of educators who work with districts and schools to help implement the Common Core and other initiatives.

The state has a long history of working to turn around low-performing schools and with Race to the Top funds, the state wanted to figure out better ways to make sure that more than just the lowest performers get the support that they need. To that end the state created the School Innovation Fund, a competitive grant program for districts and partner organizations to work together to implement school improvement grant-like models for low-achieving schools. The state solicited applications last summer and hopes to award grants to between 20 and 25 schools.

The reforms are central to changing the culture of classrooms, explains John King, the state’s commissioner of education. “The key challenge that we face, as all states do, is how do you make sure that the reform agenda really penetrates in the classroom. Because ultimately what is going to drive gains in student achievement are changes in teachers and learning,” says King. “We are one of the leading states in the country in terms of how to implement the Common Core in a way that drives change in instruction.”

New York has also been ratcheting up the rigor of its assessments, aligning them more closely with the Common Core standards. The work began well before the state received a Race to the Top grant, and in 2010, the state made its English and math assessments more difficult, causing proficiency rates to plummet. The state continues to develop new and more rigorous assessments and plans to field test aligned math and reading items in Spring 2012.

For their part, both the state and New York City have been making Race to the Top their own. Consider the state's Board of Regents, which is responsible for the supervision of the state's educational activities. The board has integrated the priorities of RTT into its own reform efforts so much so that the people in the trenches no longer dwell much on the specifics of the federal program. "People aren't talking about Race to the Top much," explains Philissa Cramer a reporter for *GothamSchools*, an online newspaper based in New York City. Instead, the focus of the debate is around either the city or the state and their efforts to improve schools, she says. "The policy agenda hasn't changed."

Still the program continues to shape the debate, with teacher evaluation being the most controversial issue. When the state legislature approved the teacher-evaluation bill, it called for 20 percent of the evaluation to be based on state tests, 20 percent on other locally selected achievement measures, and the remaining 60 percent on classroom observations and other subjective approaches. The state's teacher's union supported that effort, which also stipulated that specific details of evaluations would be approved by each district through collective bargaining.

But when the Regents approved the regulations it allowed the locally selected measures to include state tests. The teacher's union quickly pushed back, filing a lawsuit, arguing that the same exams could not be used for two of the measures. "There's a place for student growth in measuring teacher effectiveness," explains Richard Iannuzzi, president of the union. "The challenge here is that they're using a past generation's tests designed exclusively to evaluate students and the state is attempting to retrofit them so that they can evaluate teachers."

The state Supreme Court largely sided with the union last summer, finding that the Regents had overreached and placed too much emphasis on test scores. Then there was a stalemate for months over what would happen next with regard to the policy, and finally in early February, state officials and the union hammered out an agreement. "It's a victory for all New Yorkers," Gov. Andrew Cuomo said at the announcement.⁴⁰ National leaders also heaped praise on the agreement. "While collaboration is never easy, it always beats conflict and ultimately does right by our kids," said American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten.⁴¹

Under the agreement, state assessments can be used for up to 40 percent of a teacher's evaluation. The remaining 60 percent of the evaluation consists of more subjective measures and could include indicators such as locally developed exams. But a majority of the remaining 60 percent has to include classroom observations

by a principal or trained administrator. The state's education commissioner also must review and approve each district's evaluation plans to ensure quality.⁴²

The plan still faces a number of hurdles. Most importantly, school districts and their unions need to come to an agreement about the exact details of the teacher-evaluation procedures. But if a district does not have a deal with its union within a year, Cuomo has said that he will deny a scheduled 4 percent increase in state aid, which would total \$800 million, including \$300 million for New York City schools.⁴³ And for its part, the U.S. Department of Education has not ruled out the possibility that the state could still lose funds over other issues.⁴⁴

Thus far, the development appears to have built momentum. About 100 school districts and local unions have already completed negotiations on their evaluation plans, according to union officials, and some districts like Homer Central School District in Homer, New York have already put a new teacher-evaluation system in place. "Implementation is going pretty well," says Homer superintendent Nancy Ruscio. "But how it will all flush out remains to be seen."

Still the idea of even using student achievement to evaluate teachers remains controversial across the state, and more than 1,200 principals have signed a petition protesting the new system. In a position paper the principals argue that there's little evidence that using test-scores in evaluations improves practice. They also worry that collaboration among teachers will be replaced by competition. "This fundamentally misunderstands how schools work," says Dr. Sean C. Feeney, who helped write the petition and a principal of the Wheatley School in Old Westbury, New York. "The success or failure of a teacher is not on their shoulders alone."

The state has realized that it needs to do more to support the roll out of the new evaluation system, and last summer, the state moved more than \$2 million in Race to the Top funds in order to support the development of additional resources and professional development for educators on the evaluation system. The U.S. Department of Education approved the budget change in a letter to the governor.⁴⁵ But despite the change, the state continues to struggle to successfully communicate its reforms. "The State acknowledges that there were, and may continue to be, communication challenges," wrote the U.S. Department of Education in a performance review this January.⁴⁶ And one of the Center for American Progress's researchers had to place several emails and calls to find out basic information about the state's planned evaluation system.

New York has struggled in other areas of Race to the Top as well. Last summer, the state's comptroller nixed a \$27 million contract between the state and Wireless Generation, a subsidiary of News Corporation, because it had been not competitively bid. The state had signed an agreement with the company to build an "Education Data Portal," which would have allowed parents and teachers to more closely follow student performance data through a website. The state will re-bid the contract, and certain aspects of the state's data system will be delayed because of it, say state officials. The data system issues will not, however, impact the development of the new system of teacher evaluations.

Meanwhile, New York was one of just two states to post statistically significant declines on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, which is known as "the nation's report card" and administered by the National Center for Education Statistics. The declines were not large. In fourth-grade math, scores dropped from 241 to 238 from 2009 to 2011.⁴⁷ But the declines underscore the hurdles that the state faces when turning around its school system.

State leaders say that they remain optimistic that New York will eventually meet all of its RTT goals, including dramatically increasing student achievement. In its application the state promised, for instance, that it would post a 19 percentage point gain for eighth-grade Hispanic students in English language arts by the end of the grant. "Obviously the goals we set are ambitious," says King. "I mean, students in fourth-grade this year only have the one shot, right? This is their fourth-grade year, and so we can't wait around to try and change instructional experience, we've got to do that urgently."

There's no question that Commissioner King is correct. The state needs to move quickly to ensure that all students are prepared for college and today's workforce. The bigger question, though, is if New York can stay the course and implement the policies and reforms that they've promised. If so, certainly other states would have a lot to learn.

Ohio

By Maureen Kelleher

Successes:

- Despite significant changes in leadership, including a new governor, the state has made progress on a number of fronts, including implementing new Common Core standards.
- The state is piloting a new teacher-evaluation program.

Challenges:

- The state is still developing the specifics of its new teacher-evaluation program as the pilot proceeds. In December the state board of education altered the model to reflect legislation passed in June requiring that 50 percent of a teacher's evaluation be based on student test score gains.
- The state might face some difficulty in school-turnarounds. The state's first request for proposal for a turnaround partner needed to be redone and will most likely incur higher costs.

Overall evaluation:

- The Center's evaluation: meeting expectations.

Since Ohio won \$400 million in Race to the Top money in August 2010, the state has weathered major changes in political and educational leadership. Though observers rate Gov. John Kasich (R) and state superintendent Stan Heffner as more reform-minded than their predecessors, the leadership change slowed Race to the Top implementation. Meanwhile, state budget woes and public controversy over new laws—one abolishing bargaining rights for public-sector workers that sparked a successful repeal campaign, and the other requiring 50 percent of a teacher's evaluation to be based on student academic growth—have overshadowed RTT implementation in the public consciousness.

Nonetheless, Ohio scored some significant victories. For one, the state opened new avenues to bring teachers into the classroom, including Teach for America and a program to develop STEM teachers. The state also made progress on implementing Common Core State Standards and is moving forward with a teacher-evaluation pilot in the 2011-12 school year. And perhaps most importantly, Ohio's review of

each district's scope of work for RTT implementation has begun to change the long-standing, compliance-oriented relationship between the state and its districts to one that is more focused on supporting districts to achieve measurable results.

The benefit of the change in attitude can be heard at the state level. "We spent significant time in the first six months with the LEAs [local education agencies] doing the scope of work," says Michael Sawyers, deputy superintendent for the Ohio Department of Education. "It allowed us to be more customer-service oriented and provide the support they needed to be successful."

It can also be heard at the district level. "In general the state's done a really nice job with Race to the Top," says Eric Gordon, CEO of the Cleveland Municipal School District. In a departure from past practice, he notes, "We've had a lot of authority about how to get the work done." Cleveland, for example, has used Race to the Top funds to support its successful Closing the Achievement Gap program and to accelerate its Common Core implementation in grades K-2.

Yet more than 10 percent of the districts that originally signed on—60 districts—bailed out once grants began funneling down to the local level. Some of the dropouts cited concerns that the grants were too small to get the work done. They said, for example, that simply hiring staff to lead the work would eat up most of the money.

State Superintendent Heffner has stated that he expects tangible statewide results to come slowly. In a first-year implementation report produced by the advocacy group Kids Ohio, he said, "We look at the first two years to plant seeds of change. The third year is trial and error. We will really see ... fruitful results by the fifth year," the year after the grant period ends.

Ohio has back-loaded much of the implementation of its grant, and so far it has only asked the U.S. Department of Education for three timeline extensions. One delay moved reporting principal-evaluation data publicly to September 2012 from July 2011. (The state had initially promised to collect and use the data in the 2011-12 school year.) Also, the state plans to reduce the number of districts with new principal-evaluation systems in year one to 10 percent from 25 percent. The state also reduced its target in year two but expects to catch up with its original timeline in years three and four.

But the progress to date on two key initiatives—the teacher-evaluation pilot and school turnarounds—could foreshadow future problems. Originally, the state's

RTT plan called for a teacher-evaluation model to be adopted by June 2011. Lawmakers, however, used the June budget bill as an omnibus to make sweeping changes in a variety of areas, including education, where a provision called for 50 percent of a teacher's evaluation to be based on student growth. The new rule delayed formal adoption of the teacher-evaluation model until December 2011.

Despite the change, Ohio is forging ahead this year, piloting its teacher-evaluation model in 150 districts and charters. How that pilot will work with the new law requiring student growth to make up 50 percent of a teacher's evaluation remains unclear. "They're building the plane while they're flying it, and they're asking us for our boarding passes," says Rhonda Johnson, president of the Columbus Education Association. She questions how the pilot will incorporate student growth when the test scores on which Ohio's existing value-added measures are based aren't released until July. "The evaluation is to be done by April 10. I don't see how that works if the evaluation has to be done in April but you get your test scores in July."

While most school districts involved are piloting evaluation with a handful of teachers in just two schools, Columbus has chosen to pilot it with every teacher in six turnaround schools. "This [evaluation model] lends itself to getting really great feedback on three or four people. A 500-student elementary school has maybe 30 people on staff. Is it feasible you can get that deep into what you need to do?" Johnson asks. "We're going to find out."

Meanwhile, Ohio's efforts to turn around persistently low-achieving schools, an area where the state has long lagged, were slowed by delays in hiring an external partner. Longtime high school change agent KnowledgeWorks bid on the state's initial request for proposal through its consulting subsidiary, EdWorks, but the firm dropped out of the process due to concerns that the state's investment—less than \$10 million—was too small for the work involved.

"We didn't feel we could get the job done," says Harold Brown, president of EdWorks. "The idea was that [the partner] would have the ability to intervene when district plans weren't working. It would be a real robust effort to move these schools. We were surprised at the budget, given the demands. We're concerned this may not be as robust an effort [as envisioned in the RTT application]."

State officials reformulated the request for proposal, reduced the external partner's initial scope of work and hired a different vendor. The turnaround contract was awarded to the Educational Service Center of Central Ohio in August 2011 and a

cadre of turnaround specialists began work in late October. “The work could have been farther along if we’d had those people in August. They have a gap to catch up. That part has been very difficult,” says Cynthia Lemmerman, associate superintendent and director of the Center for School Improvement at the Ohio Department of Education. “My concern is, at the end of four years, three years, we’ll be in the thick of doing the work and the expectation will be that it has all been fixed.”

Kids Ohio, a nonpartisan education policy organization, has been watching Ohio’s progress on RTT and released a year one report in November 2011. “The goals of Race to the Top have really infiltrated the education goals of the state. It’s not just another grant people are working on,” observes senior policy analyst Ann Bischoff. “There’s some concern about capacity since (the state board has) downsized by a couple of hundred employees, but definitely the leadership has what it takes to carry it out.”

Rhode Island

By Theodora Chang

Successes:

- Implemented a teacher-evaluation system with a significant emphasis on student growth and all districts are trying out at least some components of the system in the 2011-12 school year.
- The state approved regulations to tie teacher certification to evaluations and outcomes. Teachers who receive an “ineffective” rating for five years in a row will lose certification.

Challenges:

- Rhode Island still needs to develop its formative and interim assessments and build up its data systems, including the integration of a teacher certification database with a state education data warehouse.
- The state partnered with charter operator Achievement First to open high-performing charter schools, but Achievement First had to change the proposed location of the schools after community protests.

Overall evaluation:

- The Center’s evaluation: meeting expectations.

In November 2011, just a little over a year after Rhode Island won \$75 million in Race to the Top funds, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan visited the state to address 500 teachers, students, and community leaders and made it very clear that he understood that education reform hasn’t come easy to the Ocean State. “I know [RTT] work is generating some tension here ... but these debates are healthy – they are necessary – and ultimately they will be fruitful. So I salute everyone here in Rhode Island for your persistence,” he said.⁴⁸

That persistence has paid off and the state has done much to move school reform forward, especially in the area of teachers and leaders. Rhode Island developed a teacher- and principal-evaluation system with three main components including value-added measures of student growth and contribution to the school community.⁴⁹ According to Deborah A. Gist, Rhode Island Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education, the state’s work on educator effectiveness “was, by design,

the foundational piece and priority for us. I think we did what we committed to do in the other areas, but the big accomplishments were about effective educators.”

While some early adopter districts will immediately implement the evaluation system in its entirety, most districts will phase it in gradually and implement only certain aspects during the 2011-12 school year, with full implementation for all districts scheduled to take place in the 2012-13 school year.

The state also successfully linked teacher certification with evaluation and performance. This was critical after a four-month delay. The delay was partly due to the appointment of new members to the Board of Regents and the time required for conducting public hearings and revising draft regulations based on public comment. These setbacks prompted the U.S. Department of Education to notify the state in August 2011 that it would withhold the entire \$18 million budgeted for improving educator effectiveness if Rhode Island did not meet a revised deadline.

Rhode Island managed to avoid losing the money when its Board of Regents approved the certification regulations just a few months later in November, after some debate over the proposed length of time that teachers could stay in the classroom after consistently receiving an “ineffective” rating. Under the new regulations, teachers will lose their certification if they receive an “ineffective” rating for five years in a row.

Education advocates in the state have commended Rhode Island’s gutsy decision to prioritize teacher effectiveness despite potential opposition. “I definitely think that tackling the teachers and leaders area was the right thing to push for first,” said Maryellen Butke, executive director of the Rhode Island Campaign for Achievement Now, or RI-CAN. “My hope is that once we finish the pilot and have a real evaluation system, we will have a foundation on which we can build progress in other areas of teacher effectiveness.”

While Rhode Island has had success in developing teacher reforms, the state delayed parts of its original plan to develop both data systems infrastructure and assessments. In its Race to the Top application, Rhode Island committed to developing high-quality interim and formative assessments, but delayed the schedule by approximately six months to align with the development of the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers assessments. The state also struggled to upgrade and expand its data capacity by building data collection portals and tools and pushed back several of these milestones by a year. Even with

these struggles, state officials did successfully train more than 3,000 teachers and school leaders on the Common Core standards through “Study of the Standards” workshops conducted throughout the state.

Rhode Island received federal approval to push back and modify two school turnaround projects—developing a turnaround principal corps and identifying school achievement specialists to work in turnaround schools. The state experienced a more challenging situation with a key part of its plan to turn around the lowest-achieving schools. Rhode Island was able to secure a commitment from Achievement First, a high-performing charter school operator, to open two schools in 2013. However, the organization’s initial plans to locate the schools in the suburb of Cranston, to serve students in Cranston and Providence, had to be scrapped after community protest. Achievement First changed its plan and proposed opening schools in Providence to serve students in Cranston, North Providence, Providence, and Warwick. On February 3, 2012, the state Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education gave preliminary approval for Achievement First to open its initial school in Providence.⁵⁰ “Transforming the lowest performing schools has been the most challenging area for us,” Commissioner Gist noted. “In a state like Rhode Island, where the number of low-performing schools is concentrated with districts with political challenges, reform becomes difficult.”

After its dogged persistence on teachers and leaders paid off in certification and evaluation changes, Rhode Island will need to maintain a focus on human capital while also directing attention to other reform milestones, such as data systems and formative and interim assessments development. “We wouldn’t have been able to accelerate our progress as much without the Race to the Top resources and support,” Rhode Island Department of Education Race to the Top Coordinator Mary-Beth Fafard said. “Our challenge for the second year is going to be to keep up the momentum and show our results to the public in a way that they can see it and understand it.”

Tennessee

By Isabel Owen

Successes:

- Tennessee implemented a new teacher- and leader-evaluation system this school year, providing ratings to most teachers.
- Although the state is taking a somewhat scaled-back approach this year, it made significant strides in establishing the Achievement School District, which gives the state's education commissioner significant control over the lowest-performing schools.
- Using Race to the Top dollars the state is funding four districts to help create alternative salary schedules to reward teachers and principals based on performance.

Challenges:

- The state still needs to work on developing its data systems. Although Tennessee currently can connect its K-12 and postsecondary data system, the process could be significantly improved.
- Tennessee continues to work on how it trains and identifies effective principals.

Overall evaluation:

- The Center's evaluation: meeting expectations.

Tennessee jumped to the front of the nation's education reform pack when it passed its First to the Top law in January 2010. The act outlined the state's education reform efforts and codified into law the foundation of its Race to the Top roadmap.

The name of the new law is obviously similar to RTT, and it signaled to stakeholders that the state was committed to the initiative with or without federal assistance. And indeed the state began working on its reform before it won a federal grant. The First to the Top law contained a number of major reforms, including establishing an Achievement School District, or ASD, which allowed the state's commissioner of education to intervene in the lowest-performing schools, and requiring annual teacher and principal evaluations based in part on student achievement data.

The passage of First to the Top was made by possible by the collaboration of a diverse and wide-ranging group of stakeholders, including then-Gov. Phil Bredesen

(D), the business community, as well as all of the state's 140 school districts. But despite the initiative's seemingly rosy beginning, pushback from teachers threatens some of the state's reforms. Additionally, when Gov. Bill Haslam (R) took office in January 2011, he did not appoint a new commissioner of education until April 2011, which slowed some of the state's reform momentum, say observers.

For the most part, though, the controversy in Tennessee has focused on the state's new teacher-evaluation system. The Teacher Evaluation Advisory Committee, established by the First to the Top law, began meeting before the state won Race to the Top and it soon developed an evaluation framework, which was adopted by the State Board of Education in April 2011. Educators were trained on the new evaluation system during the summer of 2011 and the system was implemented in 2011-12 school year.

Fifty percent of each teacher's evaluation—known as the Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model—is based on classroom observations. The remaining 50 percent is based on student outcome data. Of the student outcomes portion, 35 percent is based on individual value-added data from the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System, a data system that has collected achievement and growth data at the district, school, and teacher levels since the early 1990s. The other 15 percent is based on other measures of student achievement agreed to at the school level by teachers and administrators. The state created a list of student outcome measures for teachers and administrators to choose from including measures such as graduation rate and post-secondary matriculation.⁵¹ For teachers in grades and subjects where individual value-added data is not available, this portion of the evaluation will be based on schoolwide value-added data. The Tennessee Department of Education is currently working to develop a comparable growth measure for nontested subjects and grades.

The state has been helping teachers learn about the new evaluation system and contracted with an independent vendor that has been conducting trainings with teachers. In addition to training current teachers, the state also established a module for teacher-education programs to help them explain value-added and how it can be used. The training was infused into pre-service training starting in the fall semester 2011.

Still, reaction to the new evaluation system on the ground has been quite mixed. Some teachers have had positive reactions.⁵² "I love the instant feedback," says history teacher Arielle Garcia. She enjoys the support and helpful information from observers, she says. "I feel they're here to guide me."

But other teachers and administrators complain that the new observation system takes too much time and consider it a burden. Others are wary of how student achievement data will factor into their individual evaluations. In an effort to elevate these concerns Commissioner of Education Kevin Huffman announced slight alterations, approved by the State Board of Education, to the teacher-evaluation system, which will allow observers to group two observations together in order to reduce the amount of time spent preparing for observations.

The House Education Committee also held a hearing on teacher evaluations in November 2011. And although Gov. Haslam and the commissioner both publicly support the evaluation system, the governor has called for an outside review of the new evaluation system based on a recommendation from the House Education Committee. That independent review will be conducted by the State Collaborative on Reforming Education, an education nonprofit, and will be finished by June 1, 2012.⁵³

While much of the debate in Tennessee has focused on teacher evaluation, the state has had a number of important policy successes. For one, the state has been able to use RTT funds to help some districts move away from a simple step and lane salary schedule and allow districts to develop an alternative salary schedule that includes performance-based compensation. Under this initiative, the state has awarded RTT funding to three districts to devise new salary structures with one more district entering the program in the coming months.

Tennessee has also begun transitioning to the more rigorous Common Core standards. Beginning this year the state is phasing in the standards with a goal of full implementation by the 2014-15 school year. The state offered a number of trainings over the summer to get teachers up to speed on the new standards, and officials hope to continue training additional teachers this year.

To help engage the public, the state has also rolled out an extensive communication effort. Made up of various stakeholders, the First to the Top Advisory Council led a campaign to explain the newer and more rigorous Common Core standards and the potential decrease in student achievement scores associated with them. The state also created a dynamic Race to the Top website, ran television and radio PSAs, and used social media to get its message out.

In other areas of its grant, Tennessee has also seen some delays but appears to be on track. The state, for instance, has scaled back its approach to turning around their lowest-performing schools. Under the current plan, the state implemented a

three-tiered approach to turning around low-achievers with the most persistently lowest-performers entering the Achievement School District, which is under control of the commissioner of education.

The Race to the Top application identified 13 schools to enter the ASD, but because of leadership delays only five of those schools entered the ASD during 2011-12.⁵⁴ Those schools are now being co-managed by their district and the ASD, meaning the ASD is taking more of a role in how decisions are made for those schools. The other eight schools remain under control of their home district and will join the Achievement School District in the 2012-13 school year.

Tennessee is also behind on where it wanted to be in terms of improving its data systems. Before Race to the Top, the state already had a highly praised data system capable of connecting its K-12 and postsecondary data systems. The state is now working to make the data accessible through a data dashboard, allowing researchers, teachers, and others to look at factors that contribute to academic success.

Tennessee is also working on an early warning data system, which will track student attendance, behavior, and course completion information and alert a teacher if a student is in danger of falling behind or dropping out of school. The system was built in response to educators who said that they lacked good data on students. The system is being piloted during the 2011-12 school year.

State officials report a very different and newly beneficial relationship between the state and the U.S. Department of Education than has previously existed. The federal agency, for example, has been helpful pushing state officials to think carefully when they want to make changes to any Race to the Top program. State officials say the Department of Education asks really good questions and forces the state to think through how all portions of Race to the Top programs are interrelated, before making a change.

In the end, state leaders remain confident that they will fulfill all of the promises of the grant and they note that they're still in the early stages of their reform effort. "It's not like we have a really long track record [when it comes to RTT]," explained Gov. Haslam at an event late last year.⁵⁵ More important than speed, Haslam said, was to make sure that the state instituted the reforms well. "What's at the heart of the change we need, why we won Race to the Top, was this idea of making certain we're doing everything we can to encourage great teachers to be in the classroom."⁵⁶

Recommendations

Our analysis leads us to the following recommendations.

- **States should build capacity for reform.** States promised a great deal in many of their Race to the Top grants. If states are serious about achieving these lofty goals they will need to do far more to improve capacity and ensure the quality and fidelity of reforms at the local level. This means investing in both the people and the technology needed to produce results. It also means providing educators with the flexibility to try new approaches as well as creating operational structures that support innovation and success.
- **States must do more to improve communications.** Many states have struggled to meet their Race to the Top commitments. The reasons behind the delays and setbacks vary widely but communication issues have been central to many of the problems. Looking forward, states should do more to honestly communicate both their problems and their successes to the public. States should also post their monthly updates online with the Department of Education. This practice will go a long way to building the trust and commitment that's needed for reforms to be successful.
- **Collaboration with key stakeholders including parents, teachers, and students will be key to the success of Race to the Top, and states and districts must do more to create buy-in.** In some states the voices of key stakeholders have not been heard, and states and districts must do more to build a big tent when it comes to RTT implementation. This is particularly true in Florida, where the teachers union has had major disagreements with the state over the ways in reforms have been implemented. This has the potential to undermine the success of the program in these states.
- **Competitive programs have impact.** This recommendation may seem familiar but it only underscores its importance, and we hope this report demonstrates the case for competitive programs and that Congress supports the president's budget and its request for new and important programs such as the RESPECT Project, which offers the states \$5 billion in grants to revamp teacher policies.

- **The Department of Education should continue to play a strong role in monitoring state performance.** The Department of Education has been closely monitoring Race to the Top and shown a clear willingness to hold states accountable for their performance. The Department of Education should not waver in this regard —such support and monitoring appears to have been central to the early effectiveness of the program.

Our analysis of Race to the Top is far from the last word on the Obama administration's signature education initiative. In many ways the program is still in its infancy, and for states and districts much of the hard work remains to be done, from building capacity to shoring up political will. Nor is our analysis blind to the philosophical and practical limitations of the program. It is after all just one federal competitive program that had the unique opportunity of granting very large sums of money at a time when state budgets were in desperate shape.

Looking forward, implementation will be key. Can states continue to stick to their promises? Will teachers continue to support the initiatives? Will there be fidelity across states and districts in the quality and scope of work? No one knows for sure, but what's clear is that despite some setbacks, Race to the Top has already become an important lever for change and innovation. Few would have predicted in 2009 that a dozen states would soon be implementing new teacher-evaluation systems that would dramatically change how teachers teach. And in the end we believe that such change and innovation is a key prerequisite for the deep, systematic reform that our education system so clearly needs.

Appendix A

Full methodology and list of sources for Race to the Top implementation table

To evaluate the states we relied on six indicators arriving at each state’s evaluation by averaging the points it earned for each of the indicators. We weighted the indicators differently in order to emphasize the importance of the indicator. The first indicator received a weight of 40 percent, the second indicator received a weight of 30 percent, and the rest of the indicators received a weight of either 10 percent or 5 percent. Under our approach, states could either receive a rating of “meeting expectations” or “not meeting expectations.”

For the first indicator—the Department of Education’s judgment of state performance—we reviewed all of the Department of Education’s decision letters regarding state amendments through February 2012. The letters indicate whether a state has been put in a “high-risk” category. We gave a state a “yes,” or 100 points, if it had not been placed in a “high-risk” category. If a state was placed in a “high-risk” category it received an F, or 59 points.

The data for the second indicator—does the state have the support of key stakeholders—comes from two sources. The first source of data was an email survey that we conducted of state teachers unions in early February 2012 of each state that won a Round 1 or Round 2 Race to the Top award. In the survey we asked the unions if their union, or any teacher’s union in their state that they were aware of, had filed lawsuits related to the state’s RTT grant. We also asked if the union or any teachers union in the state had rejected a contract because of aspects of RTT. We received responses from all states except the District of Columbia. In the case of D.C., we used relevant news articles and interviews to fill in the data. The second source of data was the Department of Education’s Annual Performance Reports, which list the numbers of students in participating local education agencies as indicated in the application and the number of students in participating local education agencies as of June 30, 2011. To receive credit for this indicator, a state needed to have the following:

- The state teacher’s union may not have filed a lawsuit relating to an aspect of the RTT grant.
- The state teacher’s union may not have rejected a contract that related to an aspect of the RTT grant.
- The state may not have lost more than 15 percent of the students in participating districts after the money was awarded.

Our survey included both local and state unions since we wanted to learn more about unions that support Race to the Top and then withdrew their support. We, however, only looked at state unions that either sued or rejected a contract. We chose these indicators because we believe these data are

reasonable proxies of stakeholder support, and we awarded a state 100 points if it had the support of stakeholders and 59 points if it did not. Also, on February 16, state officials in New York came to an agreement with the state's teacher union, resolving a dispute over the state's new teacher-evaluation system. While the dispute delayed implementation, this report covers how states performed under the grant through February 29, 2012, and so New York received credit for this indicator.

Our third indicator, the state spending index, looked at whether the state was spending its grant dollars in a timely way. To calculate this measure we obtained the most recent funding reports on what each state had spent on Race to the Top so far,⁵⁷ and then we set up a ratio looking at the amount spent out of the total amount awarded relative to the number of months that had elapsed since the grant was initially awarded. This approach recognizes that Delaware and Tennessee won the first round of Race to the Top and thus had more time to spend down their funds than the second round winners. While we acknowledge that some states received approval for their scopes of work earlier than others did and were therefore technically able to spend down funds earlier, we chose to set the same start date for all Round 2 winners because they were able to be reimbursed for pre-award costs from the date that their award was announced.⁵⁸ The announcement date for Round 1 winners was March 29, 2010, and the date for Round 2 winners was August 24, 2010. We then multiplied the resulting ratios by 100 to obtain whole numbers. For evaluative purposes we ranked the states based on a broad curve, using the following scale: 10 = 100 points; 9 to 8 = 85 points; 7 to 5 = 75 points; 3 to 1 = 65 points; and, below 1 = 59 points.

The fourth indicator provides information about whether a state has implemented or started to pilot new teacher-evaluation systems. We gave states credit for piloting a new teacher-evaluation system if it had one or more schools or districts that began piloting a new evaluation system that includes student achievement in the 2011-12 school year or earlier. We used the term piloting broadly and states received credit if they were implementing only certain aspects of the program. We awarded a state 100 points if it had piloted a new evaluation system and 59 points if it did not.

The fifth indicator provides information about the degree to which the states have planned to implement specific aspects of the Common Core standards. To gain insight into the steps states were taking to implement the standards we analyzed findings from a report released by Education First and the Editorial Projects in Education, or EPE, Research Center that examined state planning activities in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Their study presents results from a summer 2011 survey of state education agency representatives and it discusses the plans that states have for implementing the Common Core without assessing the content or rigor of those plans. For our report we look at the status of plans for the following areas: teacher professional development, curriculum guides or instructional materials, and teacher-evaluation systems. States that had completed plans in all three components received 100 points; states with two components received 85 points; states with one component received 75 points; and, states

with no components received 59 points. We did not give credit to states that did not have plans in development or had no planning activity reported.

The sixth indicator provides information about each state's efforts to build high-quality data systems. We relied on data provided by the Data Quality Campaign, or DQC, from their 2011 Data for Action survey. For each of the five questions we assigned points to states based on their responses as follows:

- For DQC question 43, we gave credit to states if they provided at least three of five possible stakeholder groups with access to student-level longitudinal data from the state longitudinal data system. We did not include students as a stakeholder group.
- For DQC question 47, we gave credit to states if they provided at least three of six stakeholder groups with access to longitudinal aggregate-level data from the state longitudinal data system.
- For DQC question 56, we gave credit to states if they had at least three of five aggregate-level reports available on a state-owned public website.
- For DQC question 59, we gave credit to states if they provided both types of reports (standard and customized) to state and local policymakers.
- For DQC question 61, states received credit if they had a process for outside researchers to propose their own studies.

We then converted the information into numerical values using the following metrics: five credits = 100 points; four credits = 85 points; three credits = 75 points; two credits = 65 points; and, one or zero credits = 59 points. As noted above, the survey data from the Data Quality Campaign is not proxy data for Race to the Top performance measures since the DQC survey questions do not align exactly with the promises that the states made in their grants. We believe, however, that this information helps to paint a picture of the degree to which states have built robust data systems and serves to benchmark state performance in this area.

The seventh “bonus” indicator relating to monthly updates was not incorporated into a state's score. States received credit only if they posted detailed monthly updates on implementation progress in an easy-to-find location on their websites. Most of these are the same as the monthly implementation progress reports that states have to submit to the Department of Education and include candid information about delays and setbacks. We chose to include this indicator because it shed light on the varied transparency levels of states and their efforts to make information about their progress available to the general public. We feel that it is a fair measure of transparency because it provides key implementation information without creating too much of an additional burden on states.

After averaging the indicators together based on the weights, we then assigned our evaluation based on the following scale. Under our approach: 100 to 90 = meeting expectations; 90 and below = not meeting expectations.

Data sources for Race to the Top implementation table

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About the author

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Prior to joining the Center, Boser was a contributing editor for *U.S. News & World Report*, special projects director for *The Washington Post Express*, and research director for *Education Week* newspaper. His writings have appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Slate*, and *Smithsonian*.

Boser has written a number of influential reports. His study of school spending included the first-ever attempt to evaluate the productivity of almost every major school district in the country. Hundreds of media outlets covered the release of the report, including *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and the Associated Press. Boser also served as research director of *Leaders and Laggards*, a joint project of American Progress, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and Rick Hess of the American Enterprise Institute that evaluated state systems of education.

Boser's work has received various awards and citations. He has been an Arthur F. Burns fellow, won the National Award For Education Reporting, and been dubbed a "writer to watch" by *Washingtonian* magazine. He is also the author of the national best-selling criminal justice book, *The Gardner Heist: The True Story of the World's Largest Unsolved Art Theft*. Boser has served as a commentator on social policy issues for many media outlets, including CNN, National Public Radio, and *The New York Times*.

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