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Race to the Top – Round 2 Issue Briefs

GEORGIA: Why It Lost and What It Can Do To Win in Round 2

To assist policymakers in Round 2 of the Race to the Top planning process, we – Democrats for Education Reform, Education Equality Project, and Education Reform Now – are publishing a series of “Race Smarter” briefs, based on analysis of Round 1 applications, with the goal of informing states’ efforts to compete successfully for the remaining \$3.4 billion in Race to the Top funds. This memo provides specific analysis for Georgia.

OVERVIEW

The state of Georgia can be proud of a solid overall initial application. Georgia received 433.6 total points out of a possible 500 – 10.6 points below the “cutoff” score of 444.2.ⁱ This was the third-highest score of all 16 finalists (TN at number 2 scored 444.2, and FL ranked 4th, scoring just 2.2 points behind GA). Based on the Round 1 cutoff, Georgia would have needed to score 11 points higher to receive a grant in the first round.

Every indication we have is that the competition in Round 2 will be even stiffer than Round 1. All of the remaining finalists will be using their Round 1 feedback to strengthen their Round 2 applications, and surely some of the states that were not Round 1 finalists or that sat out the first round will submit strong applications.

To be competitive, Georgia should focus on the four key areas analyzed in this memo as the state prepares its application for Round 2.

One important factor for Georgia to consider is that its Round 1 scores may not be a reliable predictor of what happens in Round 2. The New Teacher Project points out that Georgia was one of two states for which an outlier rating from one reviewer significantly impacted its final placement.ⁱⁱ A reviewer gave Georgia a score (in the Data Systems category) “44 points higher than any other reviewer of Georgia’s application and the single highest score given by a reviewer to any finalist state.” Georgia received a perfect score on “fully implementing a state-wide longitudinal data system,” even though the state was missing two of the 12 elements required by the America COMPETES Act. If this reviewer’s score had been excluded, Georgia would have ranked 7th, rather than 3rd overall.

ROUND 1 SUMMARY

Although the second round clearly will create a whole new scoring context, Round 1 results are the best available means to inform what Georgia needs to do to compete successfully in Round 2. Below is a table summarizing reviewer results for Georgia.

SELECTION CRITERIA	POSSIBLE POINTS	POINTS GIVEN GEORGIA	NET LOSS	BEST IN CLASS
A. State Success Factors	125	102.8	22.2	Delaware (119.4) Kentucky (113.6)
B. Standards and Assessments	70	65.6	4.4	Ohio (69.4) Florida (69.0)
C. Data Systems	47	41.4	5.6	Delaware (47) Tennessee (43.6)
D. Great Teachers and Leaders	138	111.4	26.6	Louisiana (122.2) Rhode Island (121.2)
E. Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools	50	47.4	2.6	Washington, DC (50.0) Illinois (49.4) Tennessee (48.0)
F. General	55	50	5	Washington, DC (54.8) Florida (53.8)
G. STEM	15	15	0	Only DC and LA did not receive full points (15) in this category.
Total	500	433.6	66.4	

* DE had the highest score, with 454.6 points; TN, the other state to be awarded funds, received 444.2 points.

Georgia lost the greatest number of points on Great Teachers and Leaders, coming in about 10 points behind the two leaders in this area, Louisiana and Rhode Island. Four out of five reviewers docked Georgia points on criteria related to principal preparation and evaluation programs.

Three out of five reviewers also gave low marks for what they saw as an insufficient definition of “student growth” and, relatedly, the state’s ability to accurately evaluate the performance of both teachers and principals.

Georgia lost the second most points in State Success Factors — 102.8 out of a possible 125. More specifically it scored:

- 38.8 out of 45 on “Securing LEA [Local Education Agency] commitment”
- 9.4 out of 15 on “Translating LEA participation into state-wide impact”
- 17 out of 20 on “Ensuring the capacity to implement”
- 6.4 out of 10 on “Using broad stakeholder support”

What is not clear is whether reviewers made a fine enough distinction between the number of LEAs that had signed on to the plan and the state-wide impact in terms of the number of *students* (represented by these LEAs) who would be affected by Georgia’s Race to the Top plan.

As Stephen Dollinger, president of the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education, notes, “Georgia’s plan might have only involved 23 of the state’s 180 school systems, but those systems account for more than half of the state’s students. But they may not have realized that in Washington.”

Given this potential oversight by reviewers, we recommend that the state weigh the benefits of bringing additional LEAs on board with the potential consequence of compromising the ambitiousness of its plan.

SELECT REVIEWER COMMENTS

Great Teachers and Leaders

Georgia needs to develop a more effective principal preparation and evaluation program that allows alternative pathways for principals and leaders and uses student performance data to drive decisions, guide professional development and principal training, and assist in evaluations.

Reviewer 1: “There was generally little discussion about supporting the training of effective principals....There was little discussion about addressing issues of principal shortage.”

Reviewer 3: “This score could be strengthened with more narrative focused on the strategy for and plans to expand these [principal] preparation and credentialing options and programs over time. In addition, more information about high standards for principals would strengthen this score.”

Reviewer 5: “There is one alternative pathway for school superintendents and principals called Permit and it is rarely used....High quality pathways for principals need to be considered and developed....There is no discussion or linkage to national standards for leadership preparation. Furthermore, there is little discussion of the curriculum, practicum/internships, or mentorships for prospective and practicing school principals.”

Measuring Student Growth and Developing Evaluation Systems

Georgia must define “student growth” to facilitate more accurate student, teacher, and principal evaluations.

Reviewer 1: “The proposal did not fully discuss how they were defining student growth....The panel presentation and Q&A did not sufficiently describe student growth measures. Quantitative measures were not well-defined nor addressed sufficiently...”

Reviewer 2: “...Georgia does not establish clear approaches to measuring student growth in a manner consistent with the definition of student growth in the Race to the Top Federal Notice. They also do not discuss how growth is measured for individual students. As a result, all points were withheld....[P]oints are being withheld because Georgia did not clearly articulate how its evaluation system works.”

Reviewer 3: “Two pieces are missing: (1) the state’s definition of student growth and how to measure it....The state did not offer a cogent definition of student growth, speaking only to the process....This didn’t get at their perspective on defining it as the measure for their evaluation measures.”

*Note: All state applications, scores, and comments can be found here:
www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/phase1-applications/index.html*

ⁱ DE had the highest score, with 454.6 points; TN, the other state to be awarded funds, received 444.2 points.

ⁱⁱ www.tntp.org/files/RealRaceBegins.pdf

DEMOCRATS for EDUCATION REFORM

Democrats for Education Reform (DFER) is a political action committee whose mission is to encourage a more productive dialogue within the Democratic Party on the need to fundamentally reform American public education. DFER operates on all levels of government to educate elected officials and support reform-minded candidates for public office.
www.dfer.org

EDUCATION EQUALITY PROJECT

The Education Equality Project (EEP) is leading a civil rights movement to eliminate the racial and ethnic achievement gap in public education. EEP is a national, bipartisan advocacy group of elected officials, civil rights leaders, and education reformers working to bring equity to our public education system.
www.edequality.org
[www.twitter.com/EdEquality](https://twitter.com/EdEquality)

EDUCATION REFORM NOW

Education Reform Now is a national education policy and advocacy non-profit organization fighting to dramatically improve the quality of public education for America's most disadvantaged children.
www.edreformnow.org