

# RACE SMARTER

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## Race to the Top — Round 2 Issue Briefs

### ILLINOIS: 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 Illinois.

#### OVERVIEW

Illinois received a score of 423.8 total points out of a possible 500, which put the state in a high-ranking 5th place out of the 41 states that submitted Race to the Top applications. Illinois fell a mere 20.4 points short of the “cutoff” for winners in Round 1.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the state would seem to be among the three or four frontrunners for a Round 2 award, at least within the current landscape.

Illinois’ high scores reflect both the fact that it was one of several states that came out of the Race to the Top starting gate early and that it finished strong.

In June, the Illinois state legislature answered Secretary Duncan’s call to raise charter school caps and ended its session by approving 45 new charter schools in Chicago and an additional 15 charter schools in the rest of the state, for a total of 13,000 new charter school slots for students. In addition, it has entered into a partnership with *Mass Insight Education & Research Institute* to inform, support, and build capacity for its school interventions.

As a result, Illinois earned a “best in class” ranking on school turnarounds, where it scored second only to Washington, DC, and received the third-highest score in the General category, driven in large part by its new charter school law.

Illinois also made some important moves to improve teacher effectiveness before it submitted its application in January. It is one of the first states in the nation to allow alternative teacher preparation programs — such as *Teach for America*, *The New Teacher Project*, *Golden Apple*, and *Chicago Teaching Fellows* — to certify teachers directly, rather than working through cumbersome, and often ineffective and irrelevant university-based teacher preparation program requirements. Illinois will also require all districts to **incorporate student growth into teacher and principal evaluations**.

#### 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 Illinois needs to do to compete successfully in Round 2. Below is a table summarizing reviewer results for Illinois.

| SELECTION CRITERIA                             | POSSIBLE POINTS | POINTS GIVEN ILLINOIS | NET LOSS | BEST IN CLASS   |
|--|-----------------|-----------------------|----------|---|
| A. State Success Factors                       | 125             | 93.2                  | 31.8     | Delaware (119.4)<br>Kentucky (113.6)                                |
| B. Standards and Assessments                   | 70              | 68.8                  | 1.2      | Ohio (69.4)<br>Florida (69.0)                                       |
| C. Data Systems                                | 47              | 38.6                  | 8.4      | Delaware (47)<br>Tennessee (43.6)                                   |
| D. Great Teachers and Leaders                  | 138             | 110                   | 28       | Louisiana (122.2)<br>Rhode Island (121.2)                           |
| E. Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools | 50              | 49.4                  | 0.6      | Washington, DC (50.0)<br><b>Illinois (49.4)</b><br>Tennessee (48.0) |
| F. General                                     | 55              | 48.8                  | 6.2      | Washington, DC (54.8)<br>Florida (53.8)                             |
| G. STEM  | 15              | 15                    | 0        | Only DC and LA did not receive full points (15) in this category.   |
| Total  | 500             | 423.8                 | 76.2     |   |

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

Still, Illinois lost the most points in the Great Teachers and Leaders category — receiving only 110 out of 138 — placing it in the bottom third of the 16 finalists. Within this category, Illinois was weak on one criterion in particular, “Teacher and Principal Evaluations.” A more robust evaluation strategy is being phased in, but it will not be fully implemented until 2016. This is one of several specific areas within this category that Illinois may want to revisit.

Some observers have speculated that less-than-universal stakeholder support hurt Illinois’ chances in Round 1. The peer reviewer ratings, however, refute this notion. The state has demonstrated it could bring numerous, though by no means all, interested parties to the table without sacrificing the credibility or ambitiousness of its reform plan. It would be a mistake, in our opinion, for the state to retreat from aggressive goals simply to make its application palatable to those parties who would rather take an easier, go-slow approach.

## SELECT REVIEWER COMMENTS

### Great Teachers and Leaders

The state needs to flesh out the details of its plan, including how it will measure; monitor; and hold itself, Local Education Agencies (LEAs), and teacher preparation programs accountable for progress in meeting the Great Teachers and Leaders goals it has established. Illinois’ application is particularly weak in describing how it will change the evaluation process for tenured teachers. In addition, the state has some work to do to equalize the distribution of effective teachers and to increase the proportion of teachers qualified in specialty areas, such as special education, English Language Learner (ELL) classes, math, and science.

**Reviewer 1:** “Tenured teachers will be reviewed every two years. But details are not available with regard to the scope for which the evaluations will be utilized for compensation, promotion, or renewal.”

“The state did provide a minimal plan that provides tuition waivers for development of new teachers to address special high need categories such as ELL and special education — it did not address efforts to support the development of effective teachers in these areas.”

**Reviewer 2:** “The state has a satisfactory process for monitoring, evaluating, and identifying areas of teacher and principal shortages. Narrative does not go into detail about the State’s efforts or plans to prepare teachers and principals to fill these areas of shortages.”

“Targets of 100% participation by participating LEAs in all performance measures seem to conflict with the State’s comment in the narrative that it is not yet prepared to ‘immediately build a framework of statewide policies of such monumental consequence upon a still developing evaluation system.’”

**Reviewer 4:** “While the appropriate tools have been designed, annual targets have not been set to ensure equitable distribution of effective teachers.”

“The plan is unclear as to how ineffective teachers will be moved out of the system.”

“The state does not outline its process for setting annual targets for hard-to-staff subjects, i.e., math and science.

### State Success Factors

The state needs to provide greater clarity in its Round 2 application on the “Super LEA” concept; how its Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) will work in practice; and, how these components will improve state-wide impact for its lowest-achieving schools and students.

**Reviewer 1:** “The state should better explain its system for LEA participation, specifically the ‘Super LEA’ concept: how it will affect statewide implementation and impact, and how this squares with union sign-on and a somewhat complicated system of ‘Memorandums of Understanding’ (MOUs).”

**Reviewer 2:** “The LEA MOU with Chicago Public Schools (CPS) is the only one that contained deviations from the applicant’s standard form. It contains variations aimed at preventing CPS from being overextended in capacity by limiting the number of schools CPS must consider Illinois Priority School to Tier 1 schools as defined by federal requirements.”

**Reviewer 3:** “The State’s plan has strong support among key stakeholder groups, although the level of support from IFT (and other teachers unions) is an outstanding question.”

“The plan does include support letters from state and local leaders within the business, civil rights, education, and other community organizations.”

**Reviewer 4:** “Broad statewide impact is evidenced by the percentage of LEAs participating in the state plan.”

**Reviewer 4:** (same reviewer, after interviews): “Limited strategies to engage the local unions in securing support for the reform agenda remains a concern.”

**Reviewer 5:** “Illinois has created ‘Super LEAs — 12 LEAs representing 25 Illinois Priority Schools with 128,000 students where both the superintendent and the union’s leaders have agreed to ‘bigger, bolder, faster reforms.’”

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

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## 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](http://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](http://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.  
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