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Race to the Top – Round 2 Issue Briefs

LOUISIANA: 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 Louisiana.

OVERVIEW

Louisiana received 418.2 total points out of a possible 500 – 26 points below the “cutoff” score of 444.2.¹ This was a high enough score to get Louisiana into the final round. Although Louisiana is widely considered a national education reform leader, its score in Round 1 placed it 11th of the 16 finalists based on the Round 1 cutoff.

However, Louisiana’s prospects for Round 2 may be brighter than their 11th place score would indicate. If Louisiana had won the “all or nothing” 15 points in the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) category, it would have needed just 11 additional points to receive a Round 1 grant. Only one other applicant, Washington, DC, received 0 points on STEM. This could be an area in which Louisiana may need to simply better describe its policies.

Moreover, as *The New Teacher Project* (TNTP) points out, Louisiana was one of two states whose final scores were significantly affected by an outlier reviewer and the only state that was significantly negatively affected. If this low outlier score were discarded, along with the highest score, TNTP projects that Louisiana would have ranked 6th rather than 11th.

Louisiana, unlike many states did better (7.8 points) after the interview, suggesting that the more reviewers learned, the more they liked Louisiana’s plan. This is a positive for Louisiana. A Round 2 application that tells a better story of how Louisiana will transform public education and significantly improve achievement gains across the entire state could well secure Louisiana a Round 2 win.

Louisiana’s relative success in Round 1 hinged primarily on its strong showing in the Great Teachers and Leaders category. Its score of 122.2 was the highest of any of the 41 state applicants.

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

SELECTION CRITERIA	POSSIBLE POINTS	POINTS GIVEN LOUISIANA	NET LOSS	BEST IN CLASS
A. State Success Factors	125	101.6	23.4	Delaware (119.4) Kentucky (113.6)
B. Standards and Assessments	70	65.2	4.8	Ohio (69.4) Florida (69.0)
C. Data Systems	47	36.2	10.8	Delaware (47) Tennessee (43.6)
D. Great Teachers and Leaders	138	122.2	15.8	Louisiana (122.2) Rhode Island (121.2)
E. Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools	50	45	5	Washington, DC (50.0) Illinois (49.4) Tennessee (48.0)
F. General	55	48	7	Washington, DC (54.8) Florida (53.8)
G. STEM	15	0	15	Only DC and LA did not receive full points (15) in this category.
Total	500	418.2	81.8	

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

For example, Louisiana bases at least 50% of all teachers' evaluations on student achievement, and it was the first in the nation to implement a system to evaluate and hold accountable teacher preparation programs (linking student achievement data to teachers and back to their preparatory programs).

The state's weakest category was State Success Factors; here Louisiana's proposal fell short on ability to articulate how it would scale up and sustain reforms beyond the grant timeframe. Louisiana needs to make the case that the level of Local Education Agency (LEA) and teacher union support can carry the plan through successful implementation across the state.

One potentially mitigating factor is that Louisiana is one of the only states that has demonstrated its ability to make dramatic progress (having done so with the Louisiana Recovery school district) and this may in the end outweigh whether or not all LEAs wholeheartedly endorse the state's Race to the Top plan.

There were a number of reviewer comments about Louisiana having mechanisms to intervene and turn around schools and some comments about the state's means or capacity to intervene when needing to turn around a lowest-achieving school district. Louisiana's Round 2 proposal will need more details on how the Louisiana Department of Education will be redesigned to meet the Race to the Top objectives, with specific attention given to district-related reform. There will have to be clearer explanations about how the state education department's role, responsibilities, and activities will be transformed to positively impact schools and districts.

The last area of improvement under State Success Factors rests with a ramping up of what was thought by several reviewers to be less than ambitious achievement goals and benchmarks.

Louisiana is positioned well to win in Round 2 if it can redesign STEM, make the case for how its plan will scale across the state, set ambitious goals and benchmarks, and pay close attention to the details of its proposal.

SELECT REVIEWER COMMENTS

STEM

Louisiana must fundamentally rework its application to develop a high-quality STEM initiative that links to all aspects of its Race to the Top proposal.

Reviewer 3: "As handled in the proposal, STEM would be an added minor element in the RTTT [Race to the Top] initiative in LA. It does not appear in the body of the proposal as a central element, much less a commonly mentioned element. The section dedicated to STEM reads like a list of activities, without a strategic framework or coherent model. The lack of a strategic framework is especially glaring when juxtaposed the brilliant theories of change and action plans that characterize the rest of the proposal."

State Success Factors

First, the state needs to more completely explain how its plan will have state-wide impact. Second, it must come up with more ambitious goals for gains in student achievement, specifically graduation rates.

Reviewer 1 pointed out that the "state teacher association (AFT affiliate) wholeheartedly supports the work in the proposal....[T]he national AFT president, in a public speech used this state as an example of how the union and administration can work together on behalf of the educators and students to achieve reform through collaborative planning."

Reviewer 2: "[S]tudents have shown an increase in their NAEP scores, but they are still below the national average and the state's graduation target is low — 78% by 2016."

Reviewer 2: "The goals are not ambitious. The 2016 achievement targets that are articulated in the

application do not set a high bar for the students, e.g., move the 4 year graduation rate from 67% to 78%.”

Reviewer 2: “No detail was given about how the [State Education Agency] SEA will develop or hire employees with the new skills to need to carry out the work of the reorganized SEA.”

Reviewer 4: “The commitment from practitioners and school districts is conditioned in a few cases by skepticism about the absence of detailed work plans and there is no clear read in the application of how this commitment was generated.”

Reviewer 4: “[T]here is no reference in this section between data and action.”

Reviewer 5: “The applicant has taken steps to translate LEA participation into statewide impact by tying the states' 9 priority goals - set up for the whole state - to the RTT goals thus gaining more interest in and support for the work outlined in the grant.”

Data Systems To Support Student Instruction

Louisiana’s proposal in Round 2 will have to clearly articulate how student data will be used and linked at each level within K–12 to higher education and be used to inform interventions and improve instruction. Louisiana must also address how it will share data with all relevant stakeholders (e.g., parents, teachers).

Reviewer 1: On longitudinal data system: “The elements related to higher education are not fully implemented, and there is no data provided to explain how or when they will be. The capacity to communicate with higher education data systems is in a conversation stage, but to date is not functional.”

Reviewer 2: On using data to improve instruction: “[M]aking data available to researchers was not addressed.”

Reviewer 3: On longitudinal data system: “Louisiana reports that its longitudinal data system (LDS) fulfills and fully implements all criteria identified in the 12 elements of the America Competes Act. However, based on the accompanying table...[there is] no evidence of elements 1, 3 and 4. As a result, the state is awarded 18 (of 24) points.”

*Note: All state applications, scores, and comments can be found here:
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

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