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Race to the Top – Round 2 Issue Briefs

MASSACHUSETTS: 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 Massachusetts.

OVERVIEW

Massachusetts received a total score of 411.4 points of a possible 500, which ranked the state 13th among the 40 states and District of Columbia submitting applications for the first phase of Race to the Top (RTTT). Judging from its Round 1 scores, Massachusetts would have needed to score 33 points higher in order to receive a Round 1 grant.ⁱ

Massachusetts has made significant progress with recent reforms and, if it intensifies these efforts, could be highly competitive in RTTT Round 2. The passage of education reform legislation in January enabled the state to score major points in Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools and “Stimulating charter school growth” within the General category. While the state still has a cap on charter schools, recent legislation doubled the cap in mostly urban, low-performing school districts and opened the door to more innovative techniques for charter school growth in Boston.

The majority of lost points were due to the state’s lackluster proposals to improve teacher and school leader effectiveness. Reviewers gave Massachusetts low ratings in all major areas of Great Teachers and Leaders – the state received the lowest percentage of possible points, 73%, of any of the 16 finalist states. The state must strengthen its teacher evaluation system, address compensation issues, upgrade teacher preparation programs, and develop ways to ensure qualified and effective teachers are distributed as equally to high-minority and high-poverty schools as to schools in more advantaged communities.

The state lost the second most points on Standards and Assessments, primarily because state officials refused to commit fully to joining the Common Core Standards Initiative (CCSI). This cautiousness led MA to lose half the points necessary to win Round 1 funding.

ROUND 1 SUMMARY

While obviously the second round will create a whole new scoring context, Round 1 results are the best available means to inform what Massachusetts needs to do to compete successfully in Round 2. Here’s a table summarizing rater results for Massachusetts.

| SELECTION CRITERIA | POSSIBLE POINTS | POINTS GIVEN MA | NET LOSS | BEST IN CLASS |
|--|-----------------|-----------------|----------|--|
| A. State Success Factors | 125 | 111.4 | 13.6 | Delaware (119.4) Kentucky (113.6) |
| B. Standards and Assessments | 70 | 53.8 | 16.2 | Ohio (69.4) Florida (69.0) |
| C. Data Systems | 47 | 38.4 | 8.6 | Delaware (47) Tennessee (43.6) |
| D. Great Teachers and Leaders | 138 | 101.4 | 36.6 | Louisiana (122.2) Rhode Island (121.2) |
| E. Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools | 50 | 47.4 | 2.6 | Washington DC (50) Illinois (49.4) Tennessee (48.0) |
| F. General | 55 | 44 | 11.0 | Washington, D.C. (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 | 411.4 | 88.6 | |

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

While we recognize the need for common core standards, we think the opportunity to push states to develop high standards should not be sacrificed on the altar of an absolute requirement that such standards be *common* across all 50 states. Massachusetts is widely recognized as having among the highest standards of any of the 50 states. We think the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) should reconsider such a strict timeline for the adoption of CCSI, especially for a state like Massachusetts that could wind up adopting a set of standards that are lower than the ones it currently has in place if pushed too early to join CCSI. It is particularly unreasonable that the RTTT guidelines would force states to adopt CCSI standards before they are fully developed.

In order to win an award in the second round of Race to the Top, Massachusetts should concentrate on three key areas:

- 1) Fully lift its charter cap.
- 2) Strengthen its teacher evaluation system, address compensation issues, upgrade its teacher preparation programs, and develop strategies to equitably distribute highly qualified teachers to high-poverty and high-minority schools.
- 3) Work with the USDOE to carve out an agreement on the common core requirement that acknowledges the state's high standards and gives it time to review the final CCSI standards before deciding whether or not to adopt them.

SELECT REVIEWER COMMENTS

Adopting Standards

Reviewer 1: "MA earns full points, but, because the standards will not be formally adopted until after the September date identified in the RTTT proposal, the RTTT rubric specifies that MA earns 5 points rather than 20 points for Adopting Standards."

Reviewer 2: "MA's plan describes a credible and inclusive adoption process for common standards but has no specific date they are aiming to adopt the standards in Fall 2010."

Using Data to Improve Instruction

Reviewer 3: "MA's application did not seem to reflect a serious attempt to survey local instructional improvement systems and take any successes there into the effort to create the right statewide system. MA does seem serious about involving educators from Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) – both in the design of a new system as well as in the ongoing population of such a system with content. However, there could have been more consideration given to identifying and building on successful models already in use in MA."

Reviewer 4: "The desire to compare student achievement outcomes from two systems is not realistic in the timeframe given the time necessary to install, implement, train, and actually use the systems with teachers and students for a sufficient time to compare outcomes."

Improving Teacher and Principal Effectiveness based on Performance

Reviewer 2: "The MA plan does not have clear indications that the activities proposed will result in evaluations being used to inform decisions about developing teachers and principals." In addition, "Much of what is planned in this area depends on a number of pilots in a small number of LEAs. This detracts a little from the quality and credibility of the plan."

Reviewer 3: "What is not clear is how significant a role the evidence of student growth will play. Currently, MA's educator evaluation regulations do not include any measures of effectiveness based on student performance. While that in and of itself is not an issue, the fact that there is not a clearer statement of the

role evidence of student learning will play in the final...creates some important questions.”

Reviewer 5: “The State does not have a system in place for measuring student growth at this time and plans for doing so are sketchy. Similarly, plans for differentiating teacher and principal effectiveness and using effectiveness measures in performance evaluations are not very well developed.” In addition, “It does not appear there are clear guidelines and regulations for removing ineffective teachers and specific incentives and methods for recruiting, assigning, retaining, rewarding and supporting effective teachers and principals are not delineated.”

Ensuring Equitable Distribution of Effective Teachers and Principals

Reviewer 1: “There does not seem to be any way to incentivize teachers to work in low-income schools that can be hard to staff. There does not seem to be any way to ensure teachers (and principals) are assigned where they are most needed beyond staffing the absolutely failing schools.” In addition, “What is needed is a way to ensure that every high-poverty or high-minority or even STEM- intensive school has a highly effective staff.”

Reviewer 2: “MA has a reasonable strategy to effect a new increase in the supply of effective teachers but the assumption is that an increase in the total number will translate into an increase in all schools including the high-poverty schools & hard-to-staff schools with a long history of shortages. This is unlikely to be the case....”

Improving the Effectiveness of Teacher and Principal Preparation Programs

Reviewer 4: “The second part of the plan required for improving the effectiveness of teacher and principal preparation programs speaks to the expansion of preparation and credentialing options and programs that are successful. The state does not address this component of a high-quality plan at all.”

*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.

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

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