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Race to the Top – Round 2 Issue Briefs

MICHIGAN: 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 Michigan.

OVERVIEW

Michigan received 366.2 total points of a possible 500 – 78 points below the “cutoff” score of 444.2 for grant awards in Round 1.¹ Michigan finished in the middle of the pack at 21st among the 40 states and the District of Columbia. This ranking puts it within striking distance of being one of the top 10–15 states in Round 2, but only if Michigan makes some dramatic improvements to its proposal.

In Round 1, Michigan lost 49.2 points in State Success Factors, garnering a score of 75.8; the leading state in this category was Delaware (119.4), while the lowest-scoring of the 16 finalists was (93.2). The major criticisms centered on the Michigan’s lack of a coherent statewide reform agenda and minimal integration of proposed policies across major categories such as Great Teachers and Leaders and Data Systems.

The loss of points in the State Success category rippled down to other sections as well. For example, the lack of connection between student and teacher data and the absence of any means to track students’ progress from K–12 to higher education will limit the state’s ability to fully implement its overall RTTT plan to evaluate teachers and improve high school graduation and college enrollment rates.

Within the Data section, under the subcategory “Using data to improve instruction,” one reviewer praised parts of the plan and then deducted points because Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) were only “requested” to use teacher evaluation results in making human capital decisions. Obviously, consistency and integration of core elements are areas in which Michigan needs to improve significantly.

Like most states, Michigan lost the most points on Great Teachers and Leaders, 51.8, for a total score of 86.2 out of 138 possible points.

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

SELECTION CRITERIA	POSSIBLE POINTS	POINTS GIVEN MICHIGAN	NET LOSS	BEST IN CLASS
A. State Success Factors	125	75.8	49.2	Delaware (119.4) Kentucky (113.6)
B. Standards and Assessments	70	66.6	3.4	Ohio (69.4) Florida (69.0)
C. Data Systems	47	30	17	Delaware (47) Tennessee (43.6)
D. Great Teachers and Leaders	138	86.2	51.8	Louisiana (122.2) Rhode Island (121.2)
E. Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools	50	43.2	6.8	Washington DC (50) Illinois (49.4) Tennessee (48.0)
F. General	55	49.4	5.6	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	366.2	133.8	

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

Among the finalists, Louisiana had the most points in this category (122.2), while Ohio had the fewest (102.2). Overall, the reviewers liked many of Michigan's proposals, but wanted more information on how the plan would be implemented at the local level and what the state-wide impact would be.

Michigan's loss of 17 points on Data Systems to Support Instruction was directly tied to the state's missing five of the 12 elements of the America COMPETES Act.

Michigan was competitive with other Round 1 finalist states in the Standards and Assessments and General categories. Several reviewers also commented on Michigan's strong STEM initiatives that have blanketed the state.

Some reviewers raised questions about low levels of union support and the statewide impact of the teacher and principal evaluation plan. In one subcategory of Great Teachers and Leaders, "Providing high-quality pathways to aspiring teachers and principals," one reviewer called out Michigan for needing to have "strategies that go beyond encouragement."

Unlike other states, Michigan's teacher evaluation system is not centrally administered by the state department of education. Instead, it is highly decentralized and is designed to be developed and administered locally, with each individual LEA working with the local teacher's union to develop its own plan, which must then be approved by the state department of education for approval.

Yet, even these locally agreed-upon plans cannot supersede collective bargaining agreements already in effect. As a result, statewide implementation would be at best a patchwork of highly varied, local evaluation plans. This system greatly undermines the potential state-wide impact and the possibility of uniform accountability measures; the reviewers' ratings reflect these limitations.

Michigan should address the state-wide impact of its plan and implementation problems at the local level by setting clearer state guidelines, not by further watering down its proposal to appease interest groups that are opposed to bold change. A number of competing states like Florida and Louisiana achieved upwards of 25 more points than Michigan in this section, with similar levels of teacher union support.

Michigan should amend its statutes to allow the Michigan Department of Education to set minimum criteria for teacher/principal evaluation system quality and establish "default" systems in cases where a local LEA and its teacher union cannot reach consensus. Tennessee and a few other states have made this possible through explicit legislation that requires student academic growth to be included in evaluations about promotion, compensation, and tenure.

In conclusion, Michigan needs to make some significant changes to its Round 2 application to ensure that there are "great teachers and leaders in every school" and make a more convincing case that all of the reforms proposed will have a dramatic statewide impact on raising achievement and closing gaps.

SELECT REVIEWER COMMENTS

State Success Factors

Within the State Success Factors category, Michigan was particularly weak in the subsection, "Articulating State's education reform agenda and LEA participation," clearly lacking a unifying strategy. Michigan will have to integrate the individual components of its application to convince reviewers that the plan will have broad statewide impact. It must make sure that what it promises in one section of its application can actually be delivered through policies and procedures outlined in other sections. Moreover, it will have to more clearly describe its past success in improving student outcomes and its plan for raising achievement and graduation rates.

Reviewer 2: On articulating a comprehensive, coherent reform agenda: “Goals were not presented as a unified whole, and, in even though laudable projects and initiatives were listed and in some cases described, the specific processes to be used for attaining these goals were not presented as a comprehensive package. The connections among the myriad initiatives discussed did not translate into broad statewide impact. At times the connections had to be inferred.”

Reviewer 4: On improving student outcomes: “Michigan provided NAEP scores in the appendix but provided no analysis or tables or graphs to support the brief narrative describing student movement in NAEP measures.”

Reviewer 5: On improving student outcomes: “There is not much description of specific efforts to raise achievement or decrease the gap, so there is little connection between the test data and activities. While acknowledging a change in methodology in determining the graduation rates in 2007, there is no data reported on graduation rates either for the new or the old methodologies.”

Great Teachers and Leaders

Reviewers saw the state’s plan as vague and lacking ambition and rigor. The state needs to be clearer about how it will ensure LEA implementation of its teacher and principal evaluation plan, and should eliminate loopholes such as those that allow for local negotiations and prior collective bargaining agreements to “trump” new teacher evaluation plans. Clearer and more ambitious plans to create high-quality pathways for aspiring teachers and principals to equalize the distribution of qualified and effective teachers are also essential if Michigan is to be competitive in Round 2.

Reviewer 1: Providing high-quality pathways for aspiring teachers and principals: “ Since no qualifying alternative principal certification programs exist, and further since both currently existing alternative teacher certification programs are delivered by postsecondary institutions, the applicant earns 3 points [of a possible 7] on this criterion.”

Reviewer 1: Ensuring equitable distribution of effective teachers and principals: “Though these programs [e.g., Wilson MI Teaching Fellowship Program and STEM] may be promising, the lack of detail in the applicant’s description leaves the potential scope, size and success rate of these programs difficult to determine. In short, this raises questions about the feasibility of using these methods to effectively address shortage areas.”

Reviewer 1: Providing effective support to teachers and principals: “Finally, the state’s professional development plan does not incorporate the state’s universities, even though its postsecondary sector is one of the state’s strongest resources.”

Reviewer 2: Improving teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance: “Rudimentary plans are in place for the development of a longitudinal data system, but the data system will not be operational until 2012 and growth will be measured only for those students present for the entire period. This criterion will eliminate significant numbers of students from the denominator in areas of high mobility. Clarification is needed.”

Reviewer 3: Providing high-quality pathways for aspiring teachers and principals: “One weakness may be the reluctance of Michigan to search for stronger programs to teach English to immigrants.”

Reviewer 3: Improving teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance: “Existing principals and central office would be ‘grandfathered,’ which might slow down implementation of reforms if less effective administrators remain in the Michigan system for another ten to twenty years. The commitment to school effectiveness must be universal.”

Reviewer 4: Improving teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance: “The proposal lacks specificity as to how the LEAs’ evaluation systems will be used, how system quality will be judged, who is responsible for judging it, and the timelines to be employed.”

Reviewer 4: Ensuring equitable distribution of effective teachers and principals: “Barriers to equitable distribution such as seniority and retention of teachers were not mentioned. Nor were state-level reforms that might address such things as contract language flexibility.”

Reviewer 5: Improving teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance: “In the area of using the evaluation system for compensation and tenure, the proposal plans a 3-tiered teacher licensure system, although the proposal does not say what the relationship between the evaluation system and the licensure system would be, nor does it state its possible use for compensating, promoting and retaining teachers.

Reviewer 5: Providing effective support to teachers and principals: “There is a significant lack of detail in this section.”

Data Systems To Support Student Instruction

The state needs to present its current data system in a clear and straightforward manner. It must define and ramp up implementation of a data system that links individual teachers with student outcome data and that matches K-12 and higher education data, if it is to be competitive.

Reviewer 1: “No- prototype for matching K-12 and postsecondary data is in place. State data system currently lacks capacity to match teachers to students.”

Reviewer 4: “The application provided a chart that described completion of the elements and inferred 10 were completed. Review of the narrative revealed that five of the elements had been completed.”

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](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