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Race to the Top – Round 2 Issue Briefs

NEW YORK: 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 New York.

OVERVIEW

New York was one of 16 finalists of the 41 states that applied for the Race to the Top Round 1. Peer reviewers awarded New York 408.6 total points out of a possible 500 – 36 points below the “cutoff” score of 444.2.¹ This was the second-lowest score of all 16 finalists (DC scored 402.4). Based on the Round 1 cutoff, New York would have needed to score 37 points higher to receive a Round 1 grant.

The single biggest factor on which New York lost points was Great Teachers and Leaders, accounting for 29% (26.8 points) of all points lost.

Second was State Success Factors, followed by Data Systems, General (which includes charter schools), and finally Turning Around the Lowest-Performing Schools.

What is clear is that New York State will have to work to improve its score in nearly every area. Its problems are across the board. For example, even if New York had scored perfectly in its weakest category, Great Teachers and Leaders, (no state came even close), it still would have come up short on the necessary points to win a grant in Round 1.

Moreover, with 25 additional non-winning states receiving feedback on their applications from Round 1, and the possible entry of states that did not apply in Round 1, the competition may indeed be stiffer in Round 2.

Finally, and notably, New York lost points after the interview stage, suggesting that New York’s application may promise more than it can actually deliver and cannot withstand tough, in-person scrutiny. To be competitive, New York’s application will have to be much more credible and presented in a way that reviewers determine to be implementation-ready.

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

SELECTION CRITERIA	POSSIBLE POINTS	POINTS GIVEN NEW YORK	NET LOSS	BEST IN CLASS
A. State Success Factors	125	104.2	20.8	Delaware (119.4) Kentucky (113.6)
B. Standards and Assessments	70	65.4	4.6	Ohio (69.4) Florida (69.0)
C. Data Systems	47	30.4	16.6	Delaware (47) Tennessee (43.6)
D. Great Teachers and Leaders	138	111.2	26.8	Louisiana (122.2) Rhode Island (121.2)
E. Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools	50	43.4	6.6	Washington DC (50) Illinois (49.4) Tennessee (48.0)
F. General	55	39	16	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	408.6	91.4	

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

SELECT REVIEWER COMMENTS

Teacher and Principal Evaluation

New York needs to go back to the drawing board to develop a teacher and principal evaluation plan that bases at least 50% of its evaluation on student achievement. The plan also must include a credible strategy for supporting struggling teachers and, ultimately, removing those teachers whose effectiveness does not improve.

Both top-scoring states in this area — Louisiana and Rhode Island — had clear plans for evaluating teacher preparation programs, linking student achievement data to teachers, and ultimately linking teachers (and their effectiveness) back to their preparation programs. Commissioner Steiner’s proposal to implement similar provisions in New York should be an integral part of the state’s Round 2 application. New York law still has a firewall that prevents student achievement data from being used in determining tenure; the firewall must be clearly and decisively taken down.

Reviewer 2: “The concept of the single teacher or principal effect score is also confusing As written this score seems to be based 30–40% on objective student growth with the remaining 60–70% based on observations This seems to indicate that an educator could get a rating of ‘Effective’ even if his or her students were not averaging a year’s worth of effective growth.”

Reviewer 3: “The narrative did not discuss tenure, but the career ladder design that was included shows tenure continuing to be granted after just three years. The proposal was silent on removing ineffective teachers.”

Reviewer 4: “This evaluation system, even when revamped, appears to have too large a focus on inputs and not a sufficient focus on the outcome of raised student achievement”

Reviewer 5: “Interestingly, the State does not hold LEAs accountable in any meaningful way to evaluating every teacher every year Further, the plan does not explain data’s role in granting tenure or removing ineffective teachers.”

Charter School Caps

New York’s attempt to argue that it effectively did not have a charter school cap, because it allowed charter expansions but not start-ups, was unsuccessful. The state needs to lift its charter school cap, more equitably fund charter schools, and exclude charter school “poison pills” from its Round 2 proposal.

Reviewer 1: “During the interview, while there was an *interest* in increasing the present cap, it was *clarified* that there is a current charter school cap of 200, which by definition puts the applicant in the *low* cap category.” [emphases added]

Reviewer 2: “NY has a hard cap on start-up charter schools. When asked to comment on the cap, the NY team’s response was not convincing enough to allay fears that as a state, NY lacks the collective will to make critical changes to existing laws that act as impediments to substantive reform. A limit of 200 start-up charters in a state with 4,500 schools, coupled with a lack of a convincing rationale for such a cap, is a significant cause for a further deduction in this area.”

Reviewer 4: “Applicant states that state law has a cap on start-up charters but attempts to argue that this does not prohibit or effectively limit the number of high-performing charter schools in the state because technically there is no cap on conversion charter schools. This reasoning is not convincing.”

Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools

New York must identify a realistic number of **persistently low-performing schools** and more ambitious plans for **reconstituting** or **converting** them.

Reviewer 2: “The identification of only 57 persistently low-achieving schools — out of approximately 4,000 — raises a credibility issue. Addressing only 57 schools in this pool of 4,000 might be realistic but may not be ambitious.”

Reviewer 4: “Despite the legal authority to do so and the technical ability to identify the lowest performing schools, the state has been slow to intervene dramatically in enough schools. In a state where there are over 4,000 schools, it appears that the state has only made efforts to close a small handful of chronically low-performing schools over the past 5 years. As such, when considering the state’s historic performance in intervening and turning around the persistently lowest performing schools, the credibility of the plan moving forward is undermined. Moreover, the targets set for intervention as part of this plan are not particularly aggressive.”

*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