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Race to the Top – Round 2 Issue Briefs

OHIO: 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 Ohio.

OVERVIEW

Ohio finished Round 1 in a respectable 10th place with 418.6 points out of a possible 500 – or 25.6 points below the “cutoff” score of 444.2.ⁱ

There are signs, however, that Ohio will need to work hard to withstand what will likely be tough scrutiny by reviewers in Round 2. The state lost the most points of any state following the interview stage – 24 points from one reviewer. Overall, between the written and interview stages the state saw a significant 4.8 point drop in its overall score. This outcome suggests that the state may have oversold its application (in the written phase) by promising more reform than it can deliver and raises issues of credibility about Ohio's promises for state-wide impact.

Problems are particularly apparent in the promissory nature of the state’s proposed reforms in relation to Great Teachers and Leaders. The plan contained some good elements such as extending the period for teacher tenure to seven years, but many reviewers raised serious questions about how swiftly, widely, and faithfully the state’s Great Teachers and Leaders reforms would be implemented.

As a result of anticipated implementation glitches and other weaknesses, Ohio ranked second from the bottom of the 16 finalists in the Great Teachers and Leaders category and last in the subcategory “Ensuring the Equitable Distribution of Effective Teachers and Principals.” This category cost Ohio 35.2 points, 43.2% of all points lost overall.

Several reviewers noted that Local Education Agencies (LEAs) will need to negotiate some of the more significant reform elements contained in Race to the Top and the state Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with their local teachers unions, which could result in changes in the details of the plan at the local level and possibly prevent or delay state-wide implementation of its reform policies.

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

SELECTION CRITERIA	POSSIBLE POINTS	POINTS GIVEN OHIO	NET LOSS	BEST IN CLASS
A. State Success Factors	125	101.4	23.6	Delaware (119.4) Kentucky (113.6)
B. Standards and Assessments	70	69.4	0.6	Ohio (69.4) Florida (69.0)
C. Data Systems	47	38.6	8.4	Delaware (47) Tennessee (43.6)
D. Great Teachers and Leaders	138	102.8	35.2	Louisiana (122.2) Rhode Island (121.2)
E. Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools	50	42.8	7.2	Washington, DC (50.0) Illinois (49.4) Tennessee (48.0)
F. General	55	48.6	6.4	Washington, DC (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	418.6	81.4	

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

In contrast, Ohio was “best in class” in the Standards and Assessments category, though there was limited variation between all the states in this category. It is a numerical win without much of a distinction.

Overall, Ohio was docked points in all categories for a repeated lack of clarity and specificity regarding the exact components of its education reform plan. The good news is that Ohio could easily submit a very strong application for Round 2 by thoroughly addressing the reviewers’ comments and spelling out its plans.

With possibly 10–15 state awards up for grabs in Round 2, No. 10 Ohio is currently situated right on the cusp of either winning hundreds of millions for education reform or walking away empty-handed. To be competitive, Ohio should revise its application so that it is equally ambitious, but also believable and implementation-ready by providing clarifying details, as discussed here, and concentrating on its two weakest categories — Great Teachers and Leaders and State Success Factors.

Great Teachers and Leaders — Teacher Evaluation and Equity

Ohio needs to recognize the limitations within its current application and address collective bargaining agreements between LEAs and local union chapters that hinder state-wide implementation of policies and practices to strengthen teacher and principal evaluation and promote the equitable distribution of effective teachers and principals in high-poverty schools and hard-to-staff subjects.

Reviewer 2: “As a state with locally controlled negotiations, Ohio does not have much control over the use of the evaluation systems for compensation. Ohio will rely very heavily on LEAs to ensure equitable distribution of effective teachers and principals....**This is a minimal plan at best....The performance measures provided raise concerns. This does not seem realistic....**Together these programs do not seem to be sufficient to fill the identified gaps.”

Reviewer 4: “More detail on how they plan to do that in partnership with teachers’ unions would strengthen this section....What remains unclear is how they (LEAs) identify and target these areas well (some detail, but more is needed) and there is no narrative on staffing hard-to-teach areas.”

Reviewer 5: “Ohio’s participating districts have agreed to work with unions to develop and use a variety of LEA specific strategies including alternatives to seniority-based placement, differentiated incentives, professional development, and working conditions improvements to improve equitable distribution of teachers....In its MOU summary, **Ohio reported that no school districts opted to participate in RTTT efforts concerning equitable distribution of hard to place staff which would appear to seriously undermine its efforts.** There was no explanation in the application for this outcome.”

State Success Factors — Tie Teacher Evaluation to Student Outcomes

Ohio’s Round 1 scores indicate that the state has not done a satisfactory job improving student outcomes or closing the achievement gap. Ohio’s second round application must include a **laser-like focus on closing the achievement gap**. It should take bold steps to ensure implementation of a state-wide plan that incorporates student achievement with incentives for LEA buy-in.

Reviewer 1: “It became clearer during the question and answer session that since the state is a ‘bargaining unit’ state, professional union participation is presently only contemplated in many LEAs and formal participation will need to be negotiated....It was further clarified that LEAs that do not sign on to the MOU will not be allowed to participate. These circumstances could negatively effect statewide implementation and impact.”

Reviewer 3: “The score here decreased because translating the systems to school-level change and influence on student achievement remains unaddressed and the issues with the inclusion of several provisions in the MOU were not addressed in a satisfactory way....Overall, the record of progress in raising

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achievement and closing gaps is notably mixed.... [T]hey couldn't speak with greater clarity to a strategy that would elevate all sub-groups."

Reviewer 5: "During this latter period, Hispanic and economically disadvantaged students' graduation rates dropped 7 to 8 percentage points which is a concern. The Ohio Achievement Test data also shows persistent problems with performance subgroups for both mathematics and reading."

*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 (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.
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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
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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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