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Race to the Top – Round 2 Issue Briefs

COLORADO: 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 Colorado.

OVERVIEW

Colorado received 409.6 total points out of a possible 500 – 34.6 points below the “cutoff” score of 444.2¹ This was the third-lowest score of all 16 finalists (NY scored 408.6 and DC scored 402.4). New York, with a charter cap in place and very weak sections on teacher quality and data, was only 1 point behind Colorado. Based on the Round 1 cutoff score, Colorado would have needed to score 35 points higher to receive a Round 1 grant.

The single biggest criteria on which Colorado lost points was **Great Teachers and Leaders**, accounting for 37% of all points lost, for a total of 33.2 points. Not unrelated to Colorado’s poor showing in this category are shortcomings in the state’s data system. The state scored 37.6 out of a possible 47, in part, because its system is missing three key elements, including a teacher identifier system with the ability to match specific teachers to student achievement data.

The second key area in which the state lost a significant number of points was **State Success Factors**, with Colorado scoring 95.2 out of 125 points. Colorado’s score put it above only Illinois and DC of the 16 finalists in this category.

While Colorado’s plan only included 134 of the state’s 178 school districts, these districts represent the vast majority of students in Colorado. Some reviewers may have given Colorado diminished points in terms of buy-in without understanding that Colorado’s plan will actually reach most students in the state. The Round 2 application will need to make a better case to reviewers that Colorado has the key districts and local union chapters committed to implementation of its proposal and that these localities can carry the reforms state-wide. Colorado’s bold reform plans should not be compromised because of concerns of undue federal influence by a small number of rural districts, each with fewer than 300 students.

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

SELECTION CRITERIA	POSSIBLE POINTS	POINTS GIVEN COLORADO	NET LOSS	BEST IN CLASS
A. State Success Factors	125	95.2	29.8	Delaware (119.4) Kentucky (113.6)
B. Standards and Assessments	70	63	7	Ohio (69.4) Florida (69.0)
C. Data Systems	47	37.6	9.4	Delaware (47) Tennessee (43.6)
D. Great Teachers and Leaders	138	104.8	33.2	Louisiana (122.2) Rhode Island (121.2)
E. Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools	50	45.2	4.8	Washington, DC (50.0) Illinois (49.4) Tennessee (48.0)
F. General	55	48.8	6.2	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	409.6	90.4	

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

The competition may indeed be stiffer in Round 2 as Colorado goes up against the 25 non-finalist states that also will have strengthened their applications from Round 1 feedback. On the positive side of the analysis, Colorado did not lose points, as some other states did, following the interviews. This suggests that perhaps the Colorado application may have been stronger than its initial scores and that the state team did a good job bringing their plan to life. It will be important to couple this in-person strength with a greatly improved written application for Colorado to be competitive in Round 2.

A more challenging problem may be to make improvements in the State Success Factors category given that many of these points are related to the level of support coming from Colorado's 178 locally controlled school districts.

SELECT REVIEWER COMMENTS

Great Teachers and Leaders

The state needs to pass bold legislation that will ensure that teacher and principal evaluation plans in every Colorado school district use student outcome data to drive decisions about retention, tenure, and pay.

Although this is the area in which the state lost the most points, the good news is that this area could be enormously improved by pending Colorado legislation addressing teacher effectiveness, which could be signed into law before the Round 2 application is due June 1.

Passage of Senator Johnston's "educator effectiveness" bill could mean as many as 10.4 additional points in the Round 2 section on improving teacher and principal effectiveness. It may also have a positive impact on other sections of Colorado's applications, as evidenced by Tennessee (one of two Round 1 winners) who passed legislation very similar to the pending legislation in Colorado.

Colorado will also have to make a better case for how the state identifies human capital needs and provides high-quality pathways for aspiring teachers and principals. The explanation in the application on expanding Teach for America and other pathways for bringing more high-quality educators to hard-to-serve schools and districts was not convincing to some reviewers.

Reviewer 1: "Aside from the special education referenced survey, the application does not adequately address how the state monitors or evaluates all areas of need related to critical educator shortages. Neither does the dependency on emergency authorizations as a primary data source nor the state's work with BOCES [Boards of Cooperative Educational Services] are judged to be sufficiently assertive actions."

Reviewer 3: "The proposal did not describe how (the various teacher and principal certification programs) are or are not linked to recruitment and preparation." The reviewer was also not sure what the level of quality was for these programs.

On "Providing effective support to teachers and principals": "There is no specific plan for state monitoring of program effects."

Reviewer 5: "This plan relies on future recommendations, not yet specified, being made to the Governor and legislature regarding modifications to current law."

"The SEA [State Education Agency] will create an 'Educator Effectiveness Index' to measure the concentration of effective teachers and principals. It is not clear what measures and methods will be employed to determine effectiveness."

State Success Factors

Stakeholder support was one, but not the only, reason the state scored low in this area. For example, reviewers also noted the lack of inclusion of tables and graphs to present state test scores and National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data, and a lack of consistency (over time) for measuring high school graduation rates.

The state must clearly articulate a reform agenda that describes the Colorado-wide impact of its bold reform plans. The state will have to clearly articulate *how* the involvement of key districts and unions will leverage the entire state to make important reforms. As Colorado's Lt. Governor Barbara O'Brien stated at a press conference announcing plans to reapply for Round 2:

We were talking like a Western state....[W]e have to have incentives to get districts and teachers to distribute themselves and to have alternative pathways because that's how you do it in a local-control state. I do think we can be much more explicit about this.

Reviewer 1: "The applicant however does not effectively address the 59% of the local unions who would not commit to RTTT plan, the underlying reasons for their unwillingness to sign on and how the state intends to address these issues going forward."

"Tables and graphs for both NAEP and the state assessments should be included."

Reviewer 3: "As a result of changing definitions within the state over the last several years, the application does not address the trend data for high school graduates over the period 2003–2009."

Data Systems To Support Student Instruction

The state lacks 3 of the 12 data system elements required under the America COMPETES Act, including the critical unique teacher identifier that enables the state to link student performance with individual teachers.

Reviewer 1: On "Fully implementing longitudinal data": "Colorado has a robust state-wide longitudinal data system which aligns currently with 9 of the 12 elements of the America Competes Act. Of these 9 existing components: 2 have been fully implemented, 7 components are in place but undergoing improvement."

Reviewer 3: "The plan places a high emphasis on the state-level system but insufficiently addresses its strategy to drive data collection from the LEA's [Local Educational Agencies] into the system."

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.
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