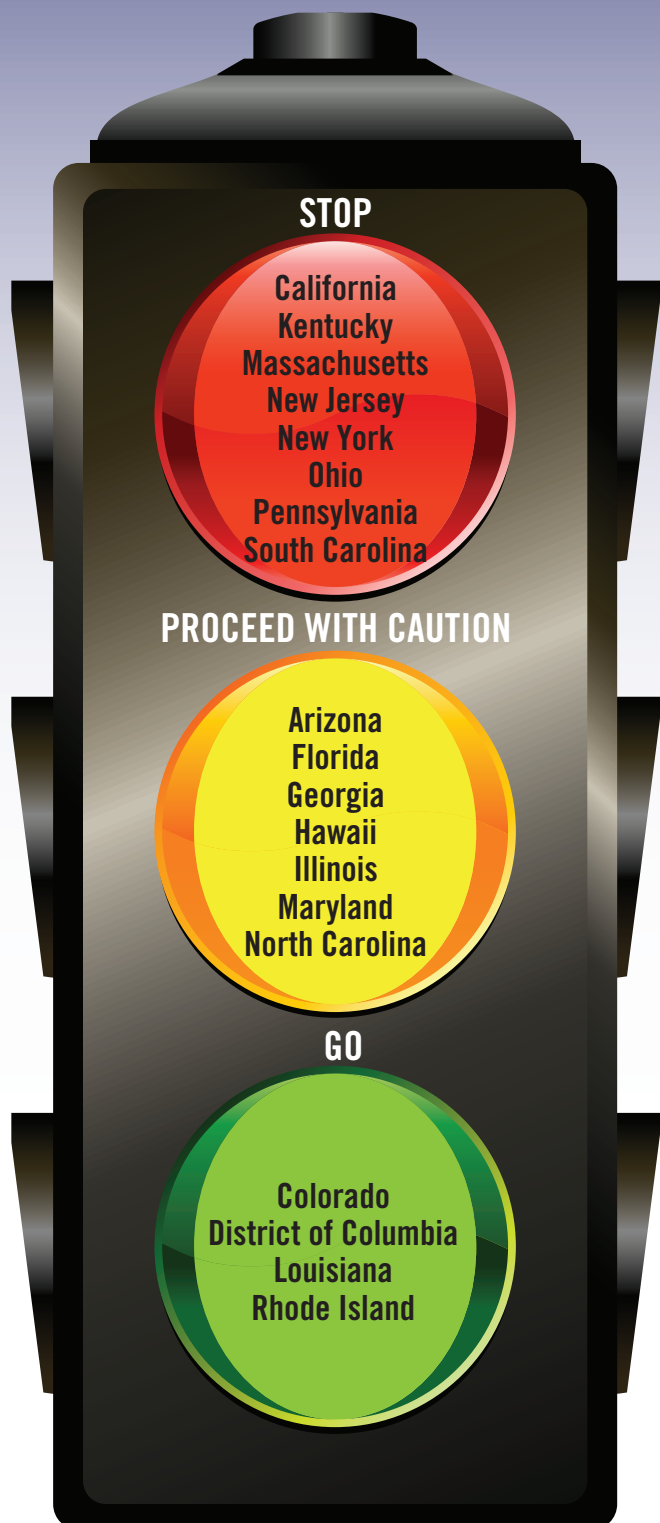


THE FINAL STRETCH: An Analysis of the Race to the Top Round 2 Finalists



The U.S. Department of Education recently announced the finalists for the second round of the Race to the Top (RTT) competition, with the winners to be announced in September. Round one of the competition yielded just two awards earlier this year, with Delaware and Tennessee claiming approximately \$600 million of the available funds. Thirty-five states and the District of Columbia applied for the remaining \$3.4 billion, and the final competitors include all of the finalists with a failed first round bid (Colorado, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and South Carolina) plus five new contenders: Arizona, California, Hawaii, Maryland and New Jersey.

On the first lap of RTT, the promise of support from unions, districts and other stakeholders appeared to weigh heavily in the reviewers' judgments. Commitment in the form of comprehensive state legislation also proved important to which states made the cut in round one.

But the rules of the road have shifted a bit for this lap of the race. The Department instituted a new funding rule, setting a range of awards from \$20–\$700 million and capping award totals based on state size. For some of the finalists, the new rule meant big budget adjustments. Colorado, Illinois, Louisiana, New York and South Carolina, for example, each needed to reduce their RTT budgets by more than \$100 million. Florida had to cut its proposal budget by a whopping \$400 million. Even with these limitations, the chosen finalists have requested a combined \$6.2 billion, almost double the available money.

Secretary of Education Arne Duncan also has signaled that the buy-in so important in steering first round reviews may not run second round applicants off the road should finalists have less than full-fledged union and district support. This is good news for states that pushed forward on reform despite resistance. But it also is a tricky issue. Opposition from important stakeholders has the potential to jeopardize the viability of a state's RTT plans, so it can't be totally discounted. At the same time, no one wants to give naysayers and defenders of the status quo veto power over bold reform efforts. In this second round, reviewers will have to contend with this tension.

Reviewers also will have to navigate a field of competitors that looks much more alike now—which may not be surprising given that states have had full view of the high scoring applications and know what the reviewers saw as the strengths and weaknesses of each proposal. With most finalists now saying most of what they believe the Department wants to hear, identifying the truly innovative and groundbreaking states willing to see the race through to its end will be the real challenge.

Finally, while the Department initially signaled that the winner’s circle would be reserved for just the few boldest of states, Secretary Duncan now suggests that there could be as many as 10–15 winners in round two. Of course, the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) understands the reality that RTT is, after all, economic stimulus funds, making it difficult to leave money on the table. And there may indeed be \$3.4 billion in awards worth making. But we still think it is worth remembering the “once in a lifetime” purpose of Race to the Top and urge the Department to hold tight to the integrity of that principle. When he announced the program one year ago, Secretary Duncan called Race to the Top “education reform’s moonshot.” We hope the Department reserves RTT for those few states that truly aim that high.

As we did for round one, NCTQ reviewed only the Great Teachers and Leaders section of each finalist application. In terms of their teacher quality proposals, we offer our take on which states we think are a “go” (green light), in which instances—and why—we think the Department needs to proceed with caution (yellow light), and in which cases the Department ought to put the brakes (red light) on a state proposal.

Our goal here is not to outline the full scope of the teacher proposals or make predictions about which states will win RTT grants. Our intent is to provide our view of the strengths and weaknesses of each finalist’s teacher reform agenda, as presented in each RTT application. It goes without saying, of course, that the applications only provide so much detail, and for proposals of this scale and breadth, the devil will certainly be in the details.

A great deal of energy has been put into the RTT competition. But the finish line isn’t even close. Writing a winning proposal only marks completion of the practice heat; the real race will begin when the winners are announced and RTT states take their marks and begin to chart the course each mapped out in its Race to the Top proposal. It remains to be seen whether this race will be one for the record books.

COLORADO

Status: Green

RTT Request: \$175 million



NCTQ thought Colorado had a good application in the first round, but we gave it a yellow light, largely based on our concern that recommendations for reform down the road would not fare as well as the adoption of statewide reform policies now.

But since the first round of RTT, Colorado forged ahead and codified much of what was a matter of proposal and recommendation in its original application. In May, Colorado passed SB10-191, the Great Teachers and Leaders bill, requiring annual evaluations based at least 50 percent on student growth measures for every teacher and principal in the state. Whereas the state’s round one application made no actual commitment to statewide changes to compensation, tenure and dismissal policies, but promised recommendations from a Governor’s Council in 2011, Colorado’s new law requires multiple measures of teacher effectiveness, career ladders with pay for the most effective teachers, and tenure only for teachers who achieve three consecutive years of effective practice in the classroom. Two consecutive years of ineffective ratings are tied to loss of tenure and, without improvement, termination. The new legislation also ensures that all teacher preparation institutions in the state are evaluated based on student performance.

The Colorado Education Association, which had worked closely with state officials in the first round, now opposes the state’s application—which just may be evidence that Colorado’s teacher proposal really does have some teeth.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Status: Green

RTT Request: \$75 million



We called the District of Columbia’s first round application “ambitious” and NCTQ’s main question was whether the District could deliver on the bold action it promised. Reviewer comments from round one suggested that this was a concern for them as well. Of particular note, the District’s first round application described a new teacher performance evaluation system, IMPACT, which pledged student performance–based evaluations with

consequences for educators and district staff in 2010—and did the District ever deliver. In late July, DC Public Schools (DCPS) fired for poor performance and exceeded a combined 241 teachers and 61 staff members. DCPS also put an additional 737 employees, including 562 teachers, on notice after issuing them “minimally effective” performance ratings.

And that isn’t the only major development since round one. In April, DCPS completed two years of negotiations on a new teacher contract. Under the new contract, ineffective teachers are subject to dismissal, regardless of tenure. Tenure may still be granted after two years, using clear standards and a fair process, but ineffective teachers and teachers rated “minimally effective” for two consecutive years are subject to removal. The contract also gives teachers the opportunity to earn performance pay for superior evaluation ratings and sets requirements for teacher professional development to ensure that all teachers have support to meet the performance expectations of IMPACT.

Some of what hurt the District’s first round application can’t be changed – its track record of successful reform and raising achievement is limited, to say the least. And there’s still a great deal to be done to improve the District’s longitudinal data system and develop value-added measures so that IMPACT has the data needed to make sound performance-based evaluations system-wide. So the District’s race to the top will be a marathon, and it is only just beginning. But it is clear to us that, at least under current leadership at the State and DCPS levels, the District of Columbia is taking on just the kind of shoot for the moon effort RTT was designed to bolster.

LOUISIANA

Status: Green

RTT Request: \$175 million



Louisiana’s first round application was strong; reviewers ranked it first among Great Teachers and Leaders proposals with 132 out of 136 points granted to the state. The state already had the advantage of a strong value-added system, including value-added accountability for teacher preparation programs, which the state proposed to make even stronger. But we gave Louisiana a yellow light because we thought that the language of the proposal felt a bit tentative around consequences associated with teachers’ value-added performance evaluations, which called for pilots in the short term and, based on how those turned out, statewide rollout later. But the state has since adopted new policies that strengthen the state’s bid for RTT funds.

In May, Louisiana amended its state law (HB 1033) to codify as statewide policy what was included in memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with participating districts in round one as a matter of intent and commitment. The new law officially requires annual evaluations and implementation of the state’s value-added assessment model by 2012-13. The law also codifies the requirement that student achievement growth count for 50 percent of teacher evaluations, with the balance based on other academic factors. Under RTT, principals will be evaluated, in part, on their performance in recruiting, retaining and cultivating effective teachers. All districts must provide professional development based on needs identified by evaluations – and must initiate dismissal of educators who, despite assistance, still do not perform adequately. The new legislation also prevents the state from granting certification or renewal to teachers who do not meet effectiveness standards for three consecutive years based on student academic growth.

RHODE ISLAND

Status: Green

RTT Request: \$75 million



Rhode Island was the only state (other than the two winners, Delaware and Tennessee) that NCTQ gave a green light to in round one – and we unequivocally stick with the state for this lap of the race. Rhode Island had the second-highest ranked Great Teachers and Leaders proposal in round one, scoring higher than both winners, and we think it was well deserved.

Rhode Island’s application stands out for its aggressive regulatory approach to reforming teacher policy. Just to highlight a few: The state adopted regulations requiring districts to have annual evaluations that “primarily” (51 percent) include student growth. New state regulations require superintendents to certify that they have dismissed all teachers rated as ineffective before the teachers reach tenure status and call for only teachers rated as effective or highly effective to be considered for school leadership, mentor corps or turnaround schools. As of July 2010, all teacher placements must be made on the basis of school needs and equitable distribution of effective teachers—not seniority. Also as of this summer, Rhode Island will prohibit ineffective teachers from transferring to high-need schools and will send student data linked to ineffective teachers to districts, requiring district leaders to certify that no student is taught by an ineffective teacher two years in a row.

There aren’t too many more points Rhode Island can earn in the teacher section. But in an effort to improve it fur-

ther, Rhode Island has added a statewide committee to oversee development of its teacher evaluation system, refocused its “turnaround teacher corps” to center on the training of experienced teachers rather than of new recruits, and made some adjustments to shave down the budget request. As far as we are concerned, this proposal is a go.

ARIZONA

Status: Yellow

RTT Request: \$ 250 million



Ranking 40th out of 41 states in round one of RTT, Arizona is the big come from behind contender in round two. The state has demonstrated an impressive acceleration in its reform agenda, including significant new legislation in the recent months. However, although we commend the progress Arizona has made, we still approach its application with caution.

Arizona has amended state statute to require that by December 15, 2011 teacher evaluations include quantitative data on student progress that accounts for a third to one half of evaluation criteria. Unfortunately that 33–50 percent window means that, statewide, there is no assurance that student data will be the preponderant criterion, although the 59 percent of participating RTT districts have agreed to use growth measures for 50 percent of their teacher evaluations. The legislature also passed a bill opening the door for salary determinations to be differentiated among tenured teachers and shortening the timeline for dismissing teachers who are rated as inadequate. Important to equitable distribution issues, the state has outlawed making layoff decisions based on tenure.

But the state is still tentative on consequences, promising guidelines for districts by 2013 on how districts should use evaluations for removing teachers who consistently receive low performance ratings.

While Arizona is no stranger to bold reforms, as evidenced by its efforts to implement pay for performance programs, the state presides over a completely decentralized evaluation landscape in which, to date, it has had no design or approval role. Arizona rejected a statewide evaluation system and proposes publishing the aggregated results of teacher evaluations for each district and comparing these data with districts’ overall student growth in search of misalignment as a tool for holding districts accountable for revamping evaluations. But this strategy strikes us as too hands-off and focused on after-the-fact compliance. We think Arizona might do well to invest more in front-

end strategies to help districts get things right from the start of the reform effort.

FLORIDA

Status: Yellow

RTT Request: \$700 million



We liked Florida’s first application – and we are still fans on the second go-around. Florida has a track record of teacher reform and has been a leader in teacher reform legislation – with early student growth measures and laws requiring performance-based evaluations and performance pay. Florida is strong across the board on alternate routes, performance evaluation, compensation, and teacher preparation accountability. To the extent that first round reviewers had concerns about stakeholder support for the application, Florida has boosted sign on to the state’s MOU from 89 percent of districts and just 8 percent of local unions in round one to 96 percent of districts and 79 percent of local teachers unions in this round of the race.

Participating districts have agreed to implement performance-based evaluations where 35 percent of teacher evaluations are based on student growth and 15 percent on other student achievement indicators determined by districts. The state’s strategy for the race is to use RTT to provide incentives and supports to get districts in Florida to implement well the provisions the state already has on the books regarding tenure, compensation and career ladders.

Despite building additional stakeholder support and district buy-in for the state’s RTT proposal, we think Florida will still be asked to reassure the Department that it can actually pull off these reforms. Between the first and second rounds, Florida worked on legislation that would have strengthened its RTT application. But in April, Governor Crist vetoed the bill that would have, among other things, required statewide that 50 percent of teacher evaluations depend on student learning growth. While participating districts will still implement the 50 percent requirement as part of Florida’s MOU, the state lost out on a chance to codify it as a requirement statewide.

Had the law passed, NCTQ would not have hesitated to give Florida a green light. We still think the state is a very good bet for a grant (and by our measure, the strongest teacher proposal among the large state finalists), but the failure of this legislation garnered national attention and is likely to have at least a few reviewers asking Governor Crist to explain what this means for the viability of his state’s reform plans.

GEORGIA

Status: Yellow

RTT Request: \$400 million

Georgia's alternate routes are in better shape than most states' and it already requires annual teacher and principal evaluations. The state is already piloting new statewide evaluation instruments and for districts participating in RTT, a new Teacher Effectiveness Measure (TEM) based 50 percent on measures of value added student performance and 10 percent on measures related to closing achievement gaps will be implemented. Participating districts will be expected to tie step increases and raises to performance-based evaluations. Georgia was the only state to include in its application a pretty detailed statewide salary schedule illustrating how a performance-based compensation strategy could work — even though the plan is opt-in for teachers in participating districts and other districts will not be required to adopt it. Georgia also proposed a new alternate route for principals that will not require candidates to be educators or have a master's degree.

But the main issue that made us give the state a yellow light in round one remains unchanged. Our concern was that the state's plan was essentially a pilot. Twenty-six districts (14 percent of all districts) have signed on to the state's MOU. Georgia added just 3 additional districts to its application for round two—for a total representation of 41 percent of the state's public school students. While Georgia pledges that it plans to extend the TEM statewide down the line, there are no specific commitments beyond working to build momentum during the RTT grant period. In a field where a number of states have bolstered legislative and regulatory support for teacher reform, reviewers ought to have some questions about the sustainability of RTT in Georgia as a statewide initiative.



fective providers to deliver induction programs that meet state standards.

In many ways, Hawaii's application says all the right things. But we are cautious. With the advantage of being a single, unitary district with only 11,400 teachers and 287 principals and a sufficient data system in place to track student growth, it is worth wondering why Hawaii can't be more ambitious. And with a track record of promising more than it delivers, the "to be determined" nature of many of the details of this MOU leaves us hesitant.

Hawaii expects "an extensive consultative process to help steer next steps and decisions." There are ideas to discuss but no specific commitment to how evaluations will be used for employment, compensation and tenure. The Hawaii Teacher Standards Board (HTSB), which has statutory authority for granting and renewing teachers' licenses, has "pledged to consider" incorporating the results of teacher evaluations in their re-licensing process. Furthermore, Hawaii is just beginning negotiations on the details for a new two-year teacher contract for SY2011–13, and while both parties have agreed that "development of a new compensation approach will be included as part of the discussions," including issues in contract negotiations is not quite the same as having a negotiated agreement in place. Anything can happen. So it is hard to know just how much weight to put on the MOU and whether Hawaii has a plan in place now or has a plan to plan.

HAWAII

Status: Yellow

RTT Request: \$75 million

The centerpiece of the teacher reforms proposed by Hawaii is an MOU with the Hawaii State Teachers Association, which, among other things, increases teacher tenure to three years, and initiates annual evaluations of all teachers, with student measures of growth to count for 50 percent of the evaluation by 2013–14. The state is also revamping its teacher induction program by providing incentives for complex areas to contract with ef-



ILLINOIS

Status: Yellow

RTT Request: \$400 million

In the last year, Illinois has passed a good deal of legislation that has made the state a strong contender for an RTT grant. For example, just as the application submission deadline approached, Illinois adopted a law overhauling principal preparation and certification requirements.

Another piece of new legislation, the Performance Evaluation Reform Act (PERA), requires student growth to count as a "significant factor" in all teacher evaluations. While significant is not specifically defined in the legislation, districts participating in RTT in Illinois must commit to 50 percent of evaluations based on growth. Thirteen "super LEAs" are waiving collective bargaining agreements to consider RTT reforms related to compensation reform. And the state intends to publish equity scorecards on districts that will highlight poor human capital decisions.

But we still think Illinois gets a yellow light. When the requirements of PERA extend to all districts in 2012–13, districts will have to use a default model evaluation



based 50 percent on growth only if no agreement is made between districts and local unions. It strikes us that this formula promises that districts and unions will work together to come to agreements—agreements where student growth and performance will not necessarily count for as much as 50 percent.

The second round application also now hedges on the state's growth measure development plans, explaining that Illinois has been advised that it may not be possible to use its standardized ISAT assessment as a statewide annual growth measure for teachers. The backup plan is to rely completely on local measures until the RTT consortium assessments are completed. But those grants aren't even awarded yet and don't have to be in place until 2013–14; growth measures from those tests wouldn't come until at least 2015. Reviewers ought to ask tough questions about this. We don't doubt there are real limitations to states' current tests, but states need to do the best with the statewide data they have while using RTT funds to strengthen their systems. Waiting until the perfect measures are in place should not be an option for RTT.

Finally, as we noted in round one, the state isn't committed to specific consequences growing out of new evaluations outside of some experiments with the super LEAs. There is commitment to using evaluations, for example, to inform tenure decisions, but there is nothing specific laid out about how that should be done.

MARYLAND

Status: Yellow

RTT Request: \$250 million

Maryland sat out the first round of Race to the Top, but immediately moved to a front-runner position. The state waited until passage of the Education Reform Act of 2010 to apply for RTT funds, which makes sense. The law and its accompanying regulations require much of what the best RTT applications include: annual teacher and principal evaluations where student growth must account for 50 percent of performance based on multiple measures of student performance (30 percent on state assessments and 20 percent on local objective measures of student performance). Furthermore, teachers and principals who do not meet at least the effective standard on the student-growth portion of their evaluations cannot be rated effective overall. The state intends to develop a model system, which districts can adopt or adjust within the parameters of the law and regulations.



Recent regulations also include additional induction requirements for new teachers, directing districts to provide a mentor and regularly scheduled opportunities for new teachers to co-teach or observe classrooms, and to provide extra assistance for teachers with poor evaluation results. The state law also requires that novice teachers must achieve an effective rating by their third year of teaching or their contract will not be renewed. The state intends to address regulatory changes to how tenured teachers might be removed in 2011, and Maryland plans to revamp its teacher certification process to align with the evaluation system.

All in all, Maryland's plan is very promising on the evaluation front. We gave the state a yellow light largely because it stopped short of tying evaluations to consequences in a bold way. Maryland's new legislation "allows" teachers and principals designated as highly effective to receive locally-negotiated financial incentives if they agree to work in high-need schools. Otherwise, subject to locally-negotiated collective bargaining agreements, districts will be invited to experiment with new models that provide differentiated compensation, with the state creating a workgroup that will pool lessons and ideas from current efforts that then can be presented to peer school districts for consideration.

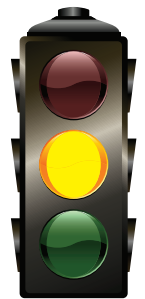
NORTH CAROLINA

Status: Yellow

RTT Request: \$400 million

NCTQ's caution about North Carolina's first round application was a lack of clarity around how student achievement would factor into the state's new teacher evaluation system. While North Carolina made some efforts to strengthen its round two proposal, we still have that concern.

On the positive side, all of the districts in the state have signed on to the state's RTT plan, and North Carolina requires all districts to use a statewide evaluation instrument for 2010–11, allowing a more efficient approach to comprehensive reform of teacher evaluation. North Carolina has a track record of providing some incentives for school-level performance and pledges its intent to move towards individual compensation for performance as the evaluation system rolls out. The state is proposing that beginning in 2010–11, it will introduce an achievement-based compensation model for teachers and principals in the state's lowest-achieving schools.



By State Board policy, beginning in the 2010–11 school year, probationary teachers who do not achieve a rating of proficient or higher on all Educator Evaluation System standards by the end of their third year will not be eligible for non-probationary licenses, and they may not continue to teach. The state also notes that new performance-based evaluations will be considered in tenure decisions. But we think the commitment outlined regarding use of evaluations in employment decisions for tenured teachers is minimal.

The state’s application describes student performance as an evaluation standard that will be “significant” in the state’s new teacher and principal evaluation process and plans to make measures of student growth an explicit and formal additional element to the five current elements in the state’s evaluation process for teachers and principals. However, North Carolina hasn’t provided more clarity around just how “significant” is significant when it comes to factoring student performance into teacher and principal evaluations—and if it is less than the preponderant criterion, the state ought to get a red light.

CALIFORNIA

Status: Red

RTT Request: \$700 million



California’s application seems to miss the mark on two of the key RTT requirements: it is not statewide reform and it is not particularly bold reform.

To be fair, the districts included in California’s round two proposal are responsible for educating 1.7 million students and include Fresno, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Sacramento and San Francisco. A total of 302 districts (out of 1729) signed on to the state’s MOU — which represents about 25 percent of students in the state. California argues in its proposal that “rather than diluting the reform plan to make it palatable” the state’s approach to RTT is to have innovative leadership districts move forward boldly with reform with the potential to mentor additional districts as they bring their powerful innovations to scale.

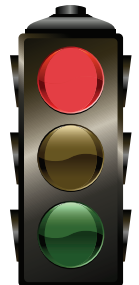
This approach is all well and good, perhaps, if the state’s RTT proposal were so bold. But the RTT districts are only committing to using growth measures for a minimum of 30 percent of teacher evaluations. This means that a district could decide to factor student performance as the preponderant criterion in teacher evaluations, but there is certainly no specific push to do so. The application pledges that new evaluations will be used in all decisions in participating districts.

We wonder whether the Department needs to fund an experiment with performance-based evaluations given what other states have proposed for RTT. It isn’t that we think California can’t down the road see statewide change grow out of the reform agenda of a few leading districts, but we aren’t sure this was the intent of RTT, which, as a competition, had an eye out for real, dramatic and statewide reform.

KENTUCKY

Status: Red

RTT Request: \$175 million



If there’s a big vision for teacher reform in Kentucky’s proposal, it once again eludes us. The state proposes a new growth model, which will account for 30-50 percent of teacher evaluations and promises a system that is “rigorous, transparent, fair, and aligned to the Commonwealth’s overall approach to continuous improvement in professional practice and student learning.” The state expects “integration” of evaluation data into personnel decisions. But the language is general and there is no obvious sign of urgency in the application. Statewide committees are at work and plan to recommend a new administrative regulation to the Board of Education three years from now — in July 2013.

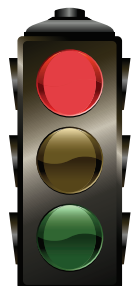
As far as we can tell from the application, Kentucky still shows no strong statewide commitment regarding the use of performance-based teacher evaluations to make employment decisions. The state is proposing a competition for a small number of districts to “experiment” with compensation reform and plans to invite districts to “test” approaches to improving equitable distribution strategies.

To us it all sounds less ambitious than necessary for a state that touts 100 percent of districts signed on to its MOU. But maybe that is exactly why everyone is on board.

MASSACHUSETTS

Status: Red

RTT Request: \$250 million



We gave Massachusetts a “red” light in the first round because the state’s proposal sounded a bit more like a pilot proposal than one for statewide teacher reform. This

NEW JERSEY



Status: Red

RTT Request: \$398 million

One of the tests of the Department's promise that lack of buy-in will not necessarily kill an application will be New Jersey, where the teacher union president describes "deep disappointment, utter frustration, and total outrage" at an eleventh hour rewrite of the state's RTT application. After New Jersey was announced as a finalist, Governor Christie said in a statement: "This announcement affirms our decision to stick with real reform and not capitulate to the watered-down, failed, status-quo approach advocated by the New Jersey Education Association."

Now, we're not ones to back down from a fight. We get that a state that needs to move forward unilaterally without its teacher organizations on board must be willing and prepared to do so. But while we know New Jersey is willing, we aren't so sure New Jersey is prepared. We would have liked to have been able to give the state at least a yellow light for presenting a set of teacher reform plans with merit. But we have serious concerns about whether the state can pull off the promised reform agenda. And the reform proposals are still too tentative, with too many of the details to be worked out later by stakeholders who now appear to be at war with one another, to garner a vote of confidence from NCTQ.

New Jersey promises a teacher evaluation system where student learning will represent at least 50 percent of the evaluation, with the remaining 50 percent based on core effective practices that are correlated with increases in student learning. However, there are no current regulations or legislation to back up the application's bid for performance-based teacher evaluation. The application is quite clear that the legislative and regulatory changes needed for the proposed teacher reform agenda are still to be made. Are those changes possible at this point?

The challenges extend to the 60 percent of the state's districts that signed on to MOUs promising to consider new teacher evaluations for decision making on tenure, bonuses for individual teachers and the criteria for reductions in force. While funding for initial bonuses will come from state RTT funds and the state will help model career ladder options, each district is going to be responsible for negotiating the agreements that are necessary for the full implementation of the New Jersey Teachers and Leaders plan. Is it realistic to expect New Jersey's districts to be successful at these negotiations given the current reform environment?

round, the application sounds a lot more like a statewide proposal, but, unfortunately, Massachusetts still doesn't commit to many specific details. A task force is in place that will recommend a revised set of regulations and principles for educator evaluation in 2011. The state also pledges to provide tools and assistance to help districts use evaluations to inform personnel decisions, but again, makes no commitment on the details. In 2012 Massachusetts intends to implement a career ladder that includes performance-based teacher leader endorsements. Over the next two years Massachusetts promises to establish educator preparation program approval regulations, identify struggling programs, provide those that can be improved with technical assistance, and close programs that are deemed the most ineffective.

Massachusetts also pledges to address teacher reform by building on its promising turnaround school work, an area where the state does have more to show for itself. The state has passed legislation enabling leaders of the lowest achieving four percent of schools to require all staff to reapply for their positions, providing principals with authority to make staff selection decisions on each candidate's merits, not seniority.

While the state insists that its new regulations will meet the requirements for teacher and principal evaluation systems set forth in the Race to the Top competition, require the adoption of new evaluation systems in every district and ground the evaluation process and standards in evidence of student performance, there just aren't many details to get one's arms around. How much will student performance count in evaluations? How, specifically, will the state ensure that districts use those evaluations to inform employment decisions and ensure the equitable distribution of highly-effective teachers?

The application actually anticipates such questions, noting that "While other states have adopted new laws dictating an arbitrary percentage of evaluation be based on student results from a single state test, we have chosen a more nuanced strategy that will support educators in developing the commitment and expertise needed to see these reforms come to life in the classroom."

The problem for RTT is that the state's nuanced strategy puts Massachusetts way behind others in committing to the details of a specific reform agenda for RTT funds.

NEW YORK

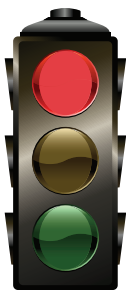
Status: Red

RTT Request: \$700 million

We commend New York for passing new legislation in May that, among other things, establishes a new teacher and principal evaluation system that makes student achievement data a substantial component of how educators are assessed and supported. However, we didn't find this enough to move New York from a red to a yellow light for round two RTT funding. The law requires that evaluations conducted on or after July 1, 2011 shall be a significant factor in a wide array of critical employment decisions, including tenure determination, promotion, supplemental compensation and termination as well as professional development. The law also provides an expedited disciplinary process for the removal of ineffective teachers and principals.

Perhaps we have given too much benefit of the doubt to a few states with undefined "significant" student growth factors in their state performance evaluations or that, in the short term, only commit to working with participating RTT districts to make student performance the preponderant criterion in teacher evaluations. In the end, those states may end up no further along than New York in ensuring that student performance is front and center in how we assess teacher performance. But New York's law is explicit in not requiring student performance to be the preponderant criterion in teacher evaluations – instead allowing for 40 percent of a teacher's composite effectiveness score to be based on student achievement measures – with the remaining 60 percent of the evaluations and ratings to be based on locally developed measures through collective bargaining agreements. Because the state makes that clear, we've given New York a red light.

While New York has obviously opened the door to making it a bit easier to remove persistently ineffective teachers, its efforts on compensation and career advancement for high-performers is not as strong as it could be. Career advancement still appears to be tied to advanced degrees in addition to performance. Beyond this, New York plans to hold competitions to allow districts to propose ways they might use evaluations to provide supplemental compensation based on new evaluations – a weaker approach than we think RTT initially demanded.



OHIO

Status: Red

RTT Request: \$400 million

In its first round proposal, Ohio identified a number of new initiatives included in its RTT proposal as a result of the state's 2009 overhaul legislation (HB 1). This legislation included a new four-step licensure system, which the state says will become the foundation for new teacher compensation statewide, as well as a four year residency program.

But we've downgraded Ohio from a yellow light to a red light based on a few important problems we now see after a second round look at its application.

First, while most other states have clarified and solidified definitions between the two rounds, Ohio remains non-committal about how student performance will be considered as a "significant" factor in teacher and principal evaluations. If that were the only concern, we might have given Ohio the benefit of the doubt. But there are other worrying issues.

Ohio made it optional for participating districts to pursue the various features of its teacher proposal. We didn't pick up on this in round one and it seems that, at first, the reviewers didn't either. But after initially giving the state the full complement of points available for securing district commitment, the reviewers took points away from the state. A closer look at the second round application still raises concerns on this front. While the state touts that it has signed more districts on to RTT, representing about 60 percent of the state's K-12 population, it appears that only about 40 percent of those total participating districts have agreed to the bolder parts of the teacher reform agenda focused on designing, conducting and using performance evaluations for employment decisions or pursuing the state's agenda for equitable distribution of teacher policies. The remaining RTT districts are considered "conditional" with a not very clear explanation of what that means. It seems to us it means not necessarily on board.

Finally, a closer look at teacher advancement and compensation leaves us underwhelmed. HB 1 changed the statutory language related to tenured teacher dismissal, changing the former requirement of evidence of "gross inefficiency or immorality" to "good and just cause," which it argues enhances the ability of districts to dismiss teachers who continue to perform at ineffective levels. But the change is noticeable in its lack of explicit reference to performance. Also noticeable is that the state still intends to reward, in its new and improved licensure system, advanced degrees, despite no evidence that such degrees contribute to teacher effectiveness. And

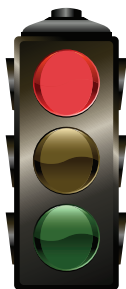


unlike several other second round finalists, the state remains tied to seniority – forgoing one opportunity to make effectiveness the centerpiece of equitable distribution strategies.

PENNSYLVANIA

Status: Red

RTT Request: \$400 million



When it comes to the Great Teachers and Leaders section of Race to the Top, we admit we do not really understand why Pennsylvania's proposal has done so well. First round reviewers gave the state a perfect score on the development of performance-based evaluations and use of those evaluations in key decisions. But, in our opinion, the proposal pales in comparison to other finalists.

Pennsylvania presents in its application a list of more than 20 draft criteria for evaluating teachers and just one of those two dozen or so elements relates to student performance. The state promises to work with educators, academic leaders and experts to craft a model for evaluating teachers where it anticipates that "somewhere between 15-35 percent" of a teacher's rating may be based on student achievement growth – making it no wonder that the state can boast that the two largest unions at the state level and 122 local union affiliates have signed on to the reform. Even the titles of the overall performance rating categories suggested for Pennsylvania's model system raise red flags – Entry, Emerging, Achieving, Highly Effective I and Highly Effective II – none of them denotes a level of poor performance. Down the road Pennsylvania intends to come up with a model career ladder to help districts develop their own compensation plans.

The state reports that 191 of the state's 500 districts signed on to Pennsylvania's application – which the state touts as representing about half of the state's low-income students. Less than full participation wouldn't be a grave issue for Pennsylvania if its reforms were truly groundbreaking and the participation level reflected an interest in preventing a watering down of reform efforts.

But we don't see anything groundbreaking here. Without student performance as a preponderant criterion in teacher evaluations; without changes in rules and regulations that demand rather than allow compensation, advancement and dismissal to be based on performance; and with all model policies designed by Pennsylvania ultimately up to districts to voluntarily adopt subject to local collective bargaining agreements, what is once in a lifetime about this RTT teacher proposal?

SOUTH CAROLINA

Status: Red

RTT Request: \$175 million



South Carolina, like other finalists, has a number of strong program elements when it comes to improving its teacher workforce. All districts in the state are on board with the RTT plan. South Carolina already has a state mandated annual evaluation system – ADEPT – and it has its strengths. Districts must annually report the employment status and evaluation results for every teacher via the state's web-based ADEPT Data System. But while the system attempts to be comprehensive by developing and assisting teachers with feedback from trained and certified evaluators and tailored professional development, the system does not include explicit measures of student performance in educator evaluations.

Now South Carolina promises to move in the direction of factoring in student performance by expanding its ADEPT system to include: (1) a value-added component based on standardized assessment data, (2) a value-added component based on project-based learning and assessments and (3) whole-school or identified group value-added data for areas without standardized tests. The state will explore and pilot new growth models and will develop its teacher effectiveness definition and rating.

This all sounds interesting, but that is about as much detail as we get. To be found "effective," teachers will be evaluated in significant part on whether their students achieve acceptable rates of student academic growth. But what is significant? The state's example of a conceptual framework for a teacher effectiveness rating includes no information about how various student performance-based criteria might be weighted—across multiple measures or within the overall teacher evaluation protocol.

The state is also not particularly committal on whether any changes are required to the state's employment and promotion decisions, except to say that the new evaluations will replace the current ones in helping to inform all of those decisions, serve as "supporting documentation" for dismissal decisions, and that lessons learned from various value-added models will lead to the development of performance-based salary incentives.



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