

# EDUCATION STIMULUS WATCH



AMERICAN ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE

SPECIAL REPORT 6

## **Creating Cover and Constructing Capacity**

Assessing the Origins, Evolution, and  
Impact of Race to the Top

By Patrick McGuinn | December 2010

AEI Working Paper



## Foreword

The past two years have been dramatic ones for education policy. The stimulus bill and President Barack Obama's outspoken leadership on education have pushed the federal government into the forefront of the education debates to an extent that—for good or ill—exceeds even the heights of the Bush administration's efforts under No Child Left Behind. The centerpiece of the administration's work has been the novel \$4.35 billion Race to the Top (RTT) program, which has garnered much praise and arguably become the most visible and celebrated school reform effort in American history.

There has been little time or opportunity to put this much-discussed program into perspective, even as the early hosannas have quieted. They have given way first to questions about the scoring and the merits of the winning states, and now to questions about whether winning states will live up to their promises. These questions are all the more pressing after November's tumultuous elections, which changed the face of state government in many winning states and which represent a stark challenge to much of the Obama administration's domestic agenda.

While the administration has called for Congress to extend the \$4.35 billion RTT program, the prospects for such a deal are bleak. Yet, whether new dollars are in the offing or not, the program will remain with us for years to come—shaping the reform agenda and providing a much-discussed model for “reform-minded” state and federal spending. The Department of Education will be adamantly working to ensure that states that won RTT funding implement their expansive plans—challenges that become even more daunting given the substantial turnover among governors and state superintendents.

Thus, I am pleased to introduce this sixth and final edition of AEI's *Education Stimulus Watch* series—in which Drew University associate professor Patrick McGuinn offers a comprehensive assessment of RTT's strengths, weaknesses, and future political viability in “Creating Cover and Constructing Capacity: Assessing the Origins, Evolution, and Impact of Race to the Top.” A celebrated education historian and author of *No Child Left Behind and the Transformation of Federal Education Policy, 1965–2005* (University Press of Kansas, 2006), McGuinn is especially well suited to explain the significance, successes, and shortcomings of RTT.

McGuinn explores the genesis and design of RTT, how the selection of winners and losers played out, and the political impact. He provides an inside-baseball view of what is happening in key states and delves deep to show how RTT has been successfully leveraged—as with efforts to promote reforms in teacher evaluation. At the same time, McGuinn takes care to explain why the implementation of RTT is dicey and faces the mammoth barriers that have thwarted past reform initiatives. McGuinn warns, “RTT will struggle to surmount these obstacles in the short term, even as it hopes to transform them over the longer term.”

I can think of no better way to draw the *Education Stimulus Watch* to a close than with McGuinn's sharp, relevant analysis. For further information on the paper, Patrick McGuinn can be reached at [pmcguinn@drew.edu](mailto:pmcguinn@drew.edu). For other AEI education working papers, please visit [www.aei.org/futureofeducation](http://www.aei.org/futureofeducation). For additional information on the activities of AEI's education policy program, please visit [www.aei.org/hess](http://www.aei.org/hess) or contact Olivia Meeks at [olivia.meeks@aei.org](mailto:olivia.meeks@aei.org).

—FREDERICK M. HESS  
 Director of Education Policy Studies  
 American Enterprise Institute



## Executive Summary

The Obama administration's Race to the Top (RTT) competitive grant program has been heralded for revolutionizing the federal role in education and transforming state school reform efforts. This paper offers an initial analysis of the origins, evolution, and impact of RTT. In many ways, RTT is an attempt to circumvent the perceived failings of No Child Left Behind and in particular the law's reliance on coercive federal mandates and the compliance culture it fostered at the state level. RTT's competitive grant process relies on incentives instead of sanctions to drive state reform. The program is fundamentally about two things: creating political cover for state education reformers to innovate and helping states construct the administrative capacity to implement these innovations effectively.

RTT has had a significant impact on the national political discourse around education and pushed many states to propose or enact important policy changes. Despite its imperfections, RTT has clearly generated considerable momentum behind education reform in the United States and pressed states into very public deliberations over thorny education reforms that have long been resisted, such as changing teacher evaluation and tenure. By pushing these issues into the spotlight, RTT has spurred new conversations and stirred the political pot around education, helping forge new alliances and creating new opportunities for reformers in state legislatures. One notable example is teacher-quality reforms, which have been pushed by education leaders like former chancellor Michelle Rhee in Washington, D.C., Colorado state senator Mike Johnston, and Ohio's outgoing governor Ted Strickland. The long-term impact of a Democratic president confronting the unions about teacher accountability and school reform may prove to be one of the most important political legacies of RTT.

RTT has shifted the focus of federal education policy from the laggards to the leaders. This shift carries with it two challenges over the long haul: how to sustain the reform push in the winning states (the leaders), and how to disseminate and motivate reform among the losing states (the laggards). RTT's success in these areas will be constrained by two crucial factors that have remained largely unchanged in federal education policy: the politics of intergovernmental relations and the limited oversight and enforcement capacity of the U.S. Department of Education. We should thus remain realistic in our expectations about what RTT can accomplish; while the program's approach may be different from that of earlier federal education programs, many of the political and institutional obstacles to sustaining meaningful reform at the federal and state levels remain largely the same. RTT will struggle to surmount these obstacles in the short term, even as it hopes to transform them over the longer term.

RTT will not single-handedly solve the problems of American education, and some of its initial achievements may well be undone over time. Nonetheless, RTT's importance should not be understated. The program has outlined a promising new approach to federal education policy in the competitive grant program, and it has generated a substantial amount of state policy change in a short period of time, particularly for a program of its relatively small size. Perhaps most important, it has significantly influenced the intensity and character of school reform discourse across the country. As a result, regardless of whether RTT continues beyond 2010 or whether states fulfill the reform commitments in their applications, the program's legacy on both education politics and policy will likely be considerable.

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AMERICAN ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE

SPECIAL REPORT 6

**"We want you to hold us accountable** and make sure that not only is every dollar wisely spent, but these dollars are significantly improving the life chances of children."

**Secretary of Education Arne Duncan**

Briefing to education associations at the Department of Education, April 3, 2009

## Creating Cover and Constructing Capacity

Assessing the Origins, Evolution, and Impact of Race to the Top

By Patrick McGuinn | December 2010

*This is the sixth in a series of special reports on the K-12 education implications of the federal government's economic stimulus package, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.*

### Introduction

The Obama administration's Race to the Top (RTT) competitive grant program has been heralded for revolutionizing the federal role in education and transforming state school reform efforts. RTT has received an extraordinary amount of media coverage and think tank analysis, yet the vast majority of the discussion to date has focused on the program's design, application, and award process. Much less attention has been devoted to analyzing the broader historical, institutional, and political contexts that led to RTT's creation and within which it will operate over the longer term. This paper represents an initial attempt to provide this context and analyze the origins, evolution, and impact of RTT. In particular, it will address the following three questions: 1) What is the theory of action behind the design of RTT? 2) What impact has RTT had on state

education politics and policy to date? and 3) What have we learned that can enhance the implementation of RTT going forward and inform future RTT competitions?

RTT is fundamentally about two things: creating political cover for state education reformers to innovate and helping states construct the administrative capacity to implement these innovations effectively. While the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and other traditional federal formula grant programs direct funds on the basis of demographics or educational need without regard to reform or achievement, RTT supports only those states that have strong track records and plans for innovation and can demonstrate key stakeholder commitment to reform. RTT has thus shifted the focus of federal education policy from the laggards to the leaders. This shift carries with it two challenges over the long haul: how to sustain the reform push in the winning states (the leaders), and how to disseminate and motivate reform among the losing states (the laggards).

RTT will not single-handedly solve the problems of American education, and some of its initial achievements may well be undone over time. Nonetheless, RTT's importance should not be understated. The program has outlined a promising new approach to federal education policy in the competitive grant program, and it has generated a substantial amount of state policy change in a short period

Patrick McGuinn (pmcguinn@drew.edu) is an associate professor in the departments of political science and education at Drew University.



of time, particularly for a program of its relatively small size. Perhaps most important, it has had a sizable impact on the intensity and character of school reform discourse across the country. As a result, regardless of whether RTT continues beyond 2010 or whether states fulfill all the reform commitments in their applications, the program's legacy on both education politics and policy is likely to be considerable.

## Part I The Design and Operation of RTT

In many ways, RTT is an attempt to circumvent the perceived failings of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and in particular the law's reliance on coercive federal mandates and the compliance culture it fostered at the state level. NCLB forced states to change many of their educational practices, but political resistance and capacity gaps at the state level meant that these changes were often more superficial than substantive. As a result, the law did not generate as much meaningful school improvement or progress in closing student-achievement gaps as was originally hoped.<sup>1</sup> RTT's design—and specifically its use of a competitive grant process—was intended to avoid these problems by relying on incentives instead of sanctions to drive state reform. Three facts in particular should shape our understanding of the design and impact of RTT: the enormously difficult task of driving systemic change in a fragmented and decentralized education system, the newness of and political opposition to federal efforts to push systemic education reform on the states, and the weakness of state and federal administrative capacity in education.

RTT's creative and complex design reflects the Obama administration's need to navigate a difficult political situation—deep inter- and intraparty division over school reform—as well as a difficult institutional situation—the limited capacity of federal and state education agencies to push reform down to the school level. This is what might be called the 50/14,000/130,000 problem in American education reform—we have fifty different state education systems that collectively contain approximately 14,000 school districts and almost 130,000 schools. States have developed vastly different education systems, and tremendous variation in school quality exists within and among states. While the United States now has clear national goals in education, it lacks a national *system* of education within which to pursue these goals, and the federal government can only indirectly attempt to drive reform through the grant-in-aid system.

As David Cohen and Susan Moffit have observed, this has greatly limited the federal government's ability to effect change in education and stymied its pursuit of educational equality.<sup>2</sup> While the federal government can sometimes use incentives to coerce states into adopting certain policies, it has struggled to get states to implement them faithfully or effectively, and they have therefore often failed to achieve their aims.<sup>3</sup> The experience of NCLB implementation made it abundantly clear that most state departments of education were ill-equipped to monitor compliance with their own policies or engage in district- and school-level interventions.<sup>4</sup> RTT represents something new, but it is an innovation largely built on an inadequate administrative foundation.

RTT was part of \$100 billion in education funds included in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009. While the vast majority of ARRA money went to preserve teachers' jobs and fund existing programs, a smaller pot of \$4.35 billion was set aside for "state incentive grants." The original legislation provided little detail on the purposes of the grants or the process for distributing them and thus gave wide discretion to the Department of Education. Inside the Beltway, the program was known as "the Duncan Fund" and "Arne's Slush Fund."<sup>5</sup> Secretary of Education Arne Duncan ultimately decided to distribute the grants through a competitive state application process that he called Race to the Top. RTT, along with a related \$650 million Investing in Innovation (I3) fund for districts and nonprofits, was intended to be a major federal investment to support promising educational reforms and reward states at the "intersection of courage, capacity, and commitment," in Duncan's words.<sup>6</sup> The first clear outline of the program emerged in July 2009 when draft regulations were released by the Department of Education. State applications would be graded on a five-hundred-point scale according to the rigor of the reforms proposed and their compatibility with four administration priorities: developing common standards and assessments; improving teacher training, evaluation, and retention policies; creating better data systems; and adopting preferred school-turnaround strategies.

**RTT's Features and Philosophy.** RTT has a number of features that make it significant and unusual in the broader context of federal education policy. The first is its use of a competitive grant process rather than a formula grant process to allocate money to states. Historically, most federal education funds have been distributed through categorical grant programs that allocate money to districts using need-based formulas. States and



districts received funding automatically, regardless of the performance of their schools or the promise of their particular school reform policies. While there has always been variation across states and districts in the amount of federal funds received, this was due to differences in state educational needs (based on the number of poor, ESL, or special-education students, for example) rather than differences in school policies. As a result, despite the expenditure of enormous and growing sums of money on K–12 education since 1965 (when ESEA was created), the national government has historically struggled to use federal education dollars as leverage to force systemic change in state education systems.<sup>7</sup> RTT (as well as I3), however, embraces a different approach, in which states and districts will only be rewarded for developing effective school reforms in line with federal goals and approaches. While RTT is not the first federal competitive grant program, it is by far the largest.<sup>8</sup>

## **RTT has shifted the focus of federal education policy from the laggards to the leaders.**

A second interesting feature of RTT is the amount of discretion that Congress gave the Department of Education over how the money would be disbursed. RTT (along with I3 and the School Improvement Grant) represents the largest pot of discretionary funds ever put at the disposal of a U.S. secretary of education. A third unusual characteristic is the emphasis on stakeholder buy-in, which pushed states to engage school districts and groups such as teachers unions in negotiations over the content of RTT applications. And a fourth significant design element of RTT was the reliance on external peer reviewers—rather than Department of Education staff—to score grant applications. Five outside reviewers scored each application, and selected finalists gave in-person presentations in Washington, D.C. Reviewers then submitted final scores, and the secretary chose the winners. In the end, Duncan decided not to overrule the reviewers' scoring and allocated funds to their top-ranked states. According to RTT rules, the amount of each grant was determined by the size of a state's student population. Fifty percent of a grant must be distributed to school districts (LEAs) according to Title I

formulas while the other 50 percent is left to the state to use in support of its reform plan as it sees fit.<sup>9</sup>

In addition, there appear to be three central elements to the philosophy behind RTT: shifting the federal role from a focus on means to a focus on ends (“tight on the goals but loose on the means”), shifting from sanctions (sticks) to incentives (carrots) as a way of motivating state reform, and shifting the Department of Education away from being a compliance-monitoring organization to being one focused on capacity building and innovation. The program's initial director Joanne Weiss stated the following:

In the past the department has operated a system based largely on compliance monitoring and formula funding. We've built entire systems around checking boxes. We need to retool our systems at the federal level so that we're focused on helping support the success of states. And states need to retool their support systems so that they are adding more value to their districts and schools, helping them to be successful and improve student outcomes. Those are not the roles that any of us have been in, but it is the big change that I think we all believe needs to happen.<sup>10</sup>

RTT aims to identify and reward promising state reform approaches and then facilitate their implementation and broader dissemination. Addressing the issue of replication, Weiss added:

There are pockets of excellence and incredible assets that a lot of states have within their borders—schools and districts that are doing tremendous work for kids. The problem is that we don't recognize those efforts, understand what it takes to replicate them, and disseminate what's working and make sure that it's spread across the state. Race to the Top is designed to help America identify which states “get” the problem and are willing to step up to the plate. . . . The hope, of course, would be that once we've got a number of states doing it, the rest of the states can come along.<sup>11</sup>

More specifically, Weiss identified five levers that are central to the Obama administration's approach in education: alignment around four central reform areas, incentives to spur innovation, competition to push states to develop comprehensive and ambitious reform plans, transparency of information that would encourage cross-state dissemination of ideas and media engagement, and frequent use of the bully pulpit to deliver a message about the urgency of reform. RTT, along with the Obama administration's other education proposals such as its ESEA reauthorization blueprint, appears to reflect genuine ambivalence about the



appropriate balance between federal mandates and state discretion in education. On the one hand, Obama administration officials often speak of the federal government's inability to force states and local districts to do things that they do not want to do and the inappropriateness of even trying to do so. On the other hand, administration officials also talk with great passion about the deep, longstanding dysfunction in state education systems, the need to use federal power to close racial and socioeconomic achievement gaps, and their belief that certain kinds of policy changes could generate major improvement. While it is not impossible to reconcile these two views philosophically, it presents a formidable challenge operationally, as RTT demonstrates.

**The Scoring Criteria.** The decision to create—and publicize in advance—such a detailed point system for awarding state grants in RTT was a crucial design choice and one that has had and will continue to have enormous implications for the way the program unfolds. While the Department of Education could simply have created an open-ended reform competition and allowed states to submit plans completely of their own design, it decided instead to identify preferred federal reform approaches and push states in those particular directions. Wary of simply mandating its preferred reform strategies through grant-in-aid conditions—as was done with NCLB and earlier iterations of ESEA—the Obama team decided to permit states to create their own education reform plans, ostensibly giving states a great deal of freedom in crafting their RTT applications. But, as Andrew Smarick has observed, the administration established guidelines for the applications that were “extraordinarily prescriptive.”<sup>12</sup>

The scoring criteria established six broad categories: state success factors, standards and assessments, data systems to support instruction, great teachers and leaders, turning around the lowest-achieving schools, and “general.” The six broad categories were divided into nineteen more specific subareas that flesh out how reforms are to be pursued, and each of these was assigned a point value. State success factors (25 percent) included articulating a coherent reform agenda, securing LEA commitment and stakeholder support, building implementation capacity, and demonstrating progress in closing achievement gaps. The standards and assessments category (14 percent) allocated points based on a state's willingness to adopt common academic standards and common assessments. The data systems score (9 percent) was based on implementation of a statewide longitudinal data system and plans for using these data to improve instruction. The section on teachers and leaders (28 percent) pushed states to develop better teacher and principal

training, evaluation, and distribution, all with a focus on student performance. School turnarounds (10 percent) rewarded states for developing new approaches to identifying and intervening in the persistently lowest-achieving schools. And finally, the general section (14 percent) gave points for supporting charter schools, improving in the “STEM” subjects (science, technology, engineering, and math), and making education funding a priority. States could not pick and choose among these areas but had to “comprehensively” address all of them to secure a grant.

While much of the focus on **RTT's** impact has been on policy, its **role as a discourse changer in education may ultimately prove more important.**

Weiss noted that the program guidelines were criticized by some for being too prescriptive, given uncertainty about the most effective school reform approaches, and by others for not being prescriptive enough, given inertial political forces that often undermine reform attempts. “The truth,” she said, “is that we don't know exactly how to turn around schools. The truth is also that excuses and inaction don't help students who are trapped in these schools. . . . What we've tried to do in the guidelines is to be clear that these four areas make up the fundamental pillars of the education system. But the right way to address each of these is often a very local issue.”<sup>13</sup>

The substantive policy dilemma described in Weiss's comments is also connected to a broader political debate over accountability and reform. RTT is thus an attempt to integrate two different views about what states need to do to reform schools, as well as an attempt to appease the political interests that embrace these different visions. In one view, the main problem for states is their lack of educational capacity—the need for additional resources and better interventions that can be deployed to improve schools. In another view, the main problem for states is the lack of political will to take on entrenched interests, change established policies, and embrace innovation. In other words, the former view claims that schools have a need for capacity to innovate, while the latter focuses on political cover to



innovate. RTT seeks to invigorate education reform by providing both increased capacity for system leaders and greater political cover for policymakers. Put differently, RTT is both a policy tool and a political tool and it should thus be evaluated on both dimensions. This has led some observers to criticize it as schizophrenic: too strong on accountability in some places but too weak in others, too centralizing on some issues but too flexible on others.

The prescriptiveness of the points system succeeded in pushing states to embrace federal priorities and methods in their applications to a greater extent than would otherwise have been the case. But it also likely narrowed the range of reform options that states considered and homogenized their plans considerably.<sup>14</sup> The result was probably less experimentation—and less ownership of state plans by the states themselves—than would have resulted from a less prescriptive approach.

Another interesting choice concerned how many points to base on past reform accomplishments versus future reform proposals. In the end, officials settled on a roughly fifty-fifty split, with a slight emphasis (52 percent) on past accomplishments over future plans (48 percent). The purpose of RTT was to push states forward, but the past-accomplishment metric was designed to ensure that states were not overpromising reforms that they were unlikely to deliver. This was a reasonable solution to a difficult problem, but in the end rewarded states almost as much for their past reforms as for their commitment to future ones.

Nonetheless, politically, the shift from pursuing federal goals through mandates to a voluntary competitive grant process like RTT helped respond to concerns that NCLB was too coercive. From a policy perspective, NCLB's failure was in many ways due to the federal government's inability to drive reform to the school level. As Paul Manna has argued, the feds have had to borrow strength from the states and rely on their capacity to administer NCLB.<sup>15</sup> But states chose to implement many NCLB provisions weakly and circumvent others, in part because of a lack of buy-in by state and district stakeholders. RTT tried to address this problem by letting states take the lead: they decided whether to apply and what package of reforms to submit. States knew that their applications would have a better chance of winning if they hewed to preferred administration reform approaches, but they nonetheless wrote their own proposals and thus retained formal ownership of them. These applications were state plans tailored to the particular circumstances and preferences of individual states, not Washington plans for school reform. And because the RTT process required stakeholder participation

and certification in state plans, the plans ostensibly represent a wider constituency.

RTT tried to strike a difficult balance between promoting bold reform by states and getting them to develop a consensus around reform by a broad range of stakeholders. Such an approach made sense given the widespread belief that opposition from “street-level bureaucrats” helped undermine the implementation of NCLB and as a way to increase the odds of sustained and successful state implementation. But it also appears to have generated confusion among reviewers and the states themselves over whether reform or consensus was more important. The emphasis on stakeholder buy-in led some reform-minded states such as Colorado and Alabama to lose despite strong plans, and others such as Indiana to decline to participate due to conflicts with teachers unions.<sup>16</sup> Joseph Morton, the Alabama schools superintendent, wrote: “Shouldn’t RTT applications be judged on a statewide vision and application that reflects needed changes and then [be] funded so those who initially resisted can witness progress and the state can build a consensus for continued reform?”<sup>17</sup>

**The Results.** Over the two rounds, RTT attracted applications from all but four states (Alaska, North Dakota, Texas, and Vermont). Initial concerns about whether laggard states would sit out the competition thus proved unfounded.<sup>18</sup> Forty states (plus D.C.) applied for the first round of RTT in January 2010. In March, the Department of Education announced sixteen finalists and later selected Delaware and Tennessee as the winners of round one (with grants of \$100 million and \$500 million, respectively). Eleven states dropped out of the competition after round one, while six new states (Maine, Maryland, Mississippi, Montana, Nevada, and Washington) entered. Thirty-five states total (as well as D.C.) applied for the second round of RTT. In July, eighteen states along with D.C. were chosen as round-two finalists, and in August ten states were announced as winners: Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, and Rhode Island, along with Washington, D.C.

Considerable debate has swirled around the worthiness of the states that won RTT grants compared to some of the losers. The consensus among experts seems to be that while some worthy states (particularly Colorado and Louisiana) were excluded, most of the twelve winning states were reasonable choices (perhaps with the exception of Hawaii and Maryland).<sup>19</sup> As the tables below reveal, there is no clear pattern between state reform and achievement grades and their finish in the RTT competition.



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## Leaders versus Laggards? RTT Ranks, Reform, and K-12 Achievement

### Winning States in Round One

State	Standards, Assessments, and Options	Achievement	Overall Education-Quality Grade	RTT Rank	Grant Amount
Delaware	A- 20 (rank)	C- 16	C+ 22	1	\$100 million
Tennessee	A- 15	D+ 29	C+ 18	2	\$500 million
U.S. Average	B	D+	C		

### Five Bottom-Scoring States in Round One

State	Standards, Assessments, and Options	Achievement	Overall Education-Quality Grade	RTT Rank
Alabama	A- 12 (rank)	F 48	C 31	37
New Hampshire	C 43	C 9	C 28	38
Nebraska	D- 51	D+ 31	D+ 49	39
Arizona	A- 18	D 44	C- 46	40
South Dakota	C 48	C- 23	C- 48	41
U.S. Average	B	D+	C	

### Winning States in Round Two

State	Standards, Assessments, and Options	Achievement	Overall Education-Quality Grade	RTT Score	Grant Amount
Massachusetts	B 25 (rank)	B 1	B 3	471.0	\$250 million
New York	A 11	C- 18	B 2	464.8	\$700 million
Hawaii	B+ 23	D 37	C 26	462.4	\$75 million
Maryland	B+ 23	B 2	B+ 1	450.0	\$250 million
Washington, D.C.	C+ 37	F 50	D+ 51	450.0	\$75 million
Florida	A 5	C 7	B- 8	452.4	\$700 million
Georgia	A- 14	D+ 28	B- 13	446.4	\$400 million
Ohio	A 3	C- 14	B- 5	440.8	\$400 million
North Carolina	B+ 21	D+ 32	C 32	441.6	\$400 million
Rhode Island	C+ 33	D 42	C 33	451.2	\$75 million
U.S. Average	B	D+	C		

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## Part II RTT's Impact on State Education Politics and Policy

RTT hoped to influence school reform in the United States both directly by encouraging state policy changes and indirectly by changing the political dynamics around education. While much of the focus on RTT's impact has been on policy, its role as a discourse changer in education may ultimately prove more important.

**State Politics.** The competition attracted a tremendous amount of attention to the issue of school reform, shone a bright light on dysfunctional state policies, and helped create new political coalitions to drive reform. The *Washington Post* declared that RTT “helped transform the national discussion on education,” while Michele McNeil from *Education Week* believes that it stimulated an unprecedented “national conversation” on school reform.<sup>20</sup> It also stimulated many state and local conversations—particularly in the context of the economic crisis and debates over budget cuts, tax increases, and teacher layoffs that brought education spending and policies into stark relief. Numerous governors pushed state legislatures to change laws to increase their RTT prospects, most prominently in California where Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger called the legislature into special session to debate a package of education reforms.<sup>21</sup>

By pushing states to engage a wide variety of stakeholders in a lengthy and public process of crafting a comprehensive educational improvement plan, RTT received an extraordinary amount of media coverage. One of RTT's strengths has been its focus on four reform areas, which provided a common vocabulary and a degree of clarity in the national school reform conversation that is ordinarily lacking. It also provided a handy yardstick with which policymakers, citizens, and journalists could measure their state's reform-mindedness in education. As



a *New York Times* editorial observed, “Thanks to the application process, even states that did not get grants now have road maps to reform and a better sense of what it will take to build better schools.”<sup>22</sup> Paul Koehler of WestEd, who worked on Arizona’s application, noted that “if you win, you’ve got a plan, and you’ve got some pretty good funding for that plan. [But] if we don’t win, we’ve still got a plan . . . a blueprint to bring stakeholders together. It really got the state motivated.”<sup>23</sup>

There is evidence, for example, that RTT’s emphasis on expanding charter schools and revamping teacher evaluations has helped change the political climate around these controversial issues, thus paving the way for reform. Shelley Skinner of the New Jersey Charter Schools Association observed that “the political environment in the state legislature and around the country has become much more favorable for charters, thanks in large part to the Race to the Top competition encouraging them.”<sup>24</sup> Federal rhetorical leadership on these issues provided crucial political cover for school reformers advocating change on the ground in states by creating an environment in which it was easier or safer for them to advance their agenda. Democrats for Education Reform declared that “the change unleashed by conditioning federal funding on bold and forward-looking state education policies is indisputable. Under the president’s leadership, local civil rights, child advocacy, business, and education reform groups, in collaboration with those states and local teacher unions ready for change, sprung into action to achieve things that they had been waiting and wanting to do for years.”<sup>25</sup> RTT’s focus on teacher accountability has also drawn attention to a number of long-ignored labor issues in education and has had a major impact on the relationship between the Democratic Party and the two major teachers unions.

RTT is empowering new actors and organizations and creating new political alliances. One of the most interesting and effective elements in RTT’s design was how it selectively empowered institutions that are more reform-oriented. At the state level, legislatures tend to be unduly influenced by narrow special interests and have been slow to embrace the kind of reforms the Obama administration advocated. But RTT put governors and chief state school officers—who are generally more inclined to endorse systemic school reforms irrespective of party affiliation—in charge of drafting state applications. By empowering these “education executives,” RTT may be speeding up what political scientist Jeffrey Henig calls “the end of educational exceptionalism” and bringing school reform debates back into mainstream politics.<sup>26</sup>

## States That Did Not Apply to RTT (Round One or Two)

State	Standards, Assessments, and Options	Achievement	Overall Education-Quality Grade
Alaska	C 40 (rank)	D+ 30	C- 42
North Dakota	B 26	C 11	C 35
Texas	A 6	C 13	C+ 14
Vermont	B 27	C+ 4	B- 12
U.S. Average	B	D+	C

SOURCE: Charts were created by the author with data from *Education Week’s Quality Counts 2010* report. Each state was given a grade and ranking compared to other states. See *Education Week, Report Card Grades States on Education Performance, Policy; Nation Scores High on Standards Policies but Struggles to Provide Opportunities to Succeed* (Washington, DC, January 2010), available at [www.edweek.org/media/ew/qc/2010/QualityCounts2010\\_PressRelease.pdf](http://www.edweek.org/media/ew/qc/2010/QualityCounts2010_PressRelease.pdf) (accessed November 17, 2010).

One of the most important long-term effects of RTT will thus likely be continuing the trend toward greater centralization of education responsibility and policy-making at the state level and, in particular, greater involvement of governors in school reform. While these trends represent a further blow to local control of schools, from the standpoint of the accountability movement they are probably positive developments.

RTT has also galvanized a variety of private-sector actors on behalf of reform: foundations (particularly the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation), think tanks (Center for American Progress), and private philanthropists (Mark Zuckerberg) are using private dollars and expertise to support and extend federal RTT reform efforts. One such organization—the Policy Innovators in Education network—chronicled the ways in which “the competition spurred dramatic shifts in political will” and “created tremendous pressure on states to develop bold plans for school reform.”<sup>27</sup> Federal grant competitions like I3 can benefit private entrepreneurs in helping build and sustain a political coalition that is dependent on—and inclined to advocate for—a robust, innovation-oriented federal role in education. These “new schools” folks, as they are sometimes called, comprise a broad array of charter school networks (such as the Knowledge Is Power Program, Green Dot, Aspire, and SEED), education management organizations (Edison, K12 Inc., and Victory), tutoring providers (Kaplan), and education consultants and service providers (New Teachers for New Schools, Teach for America, and Wireless Generation). As Stephen Brill has observed, the number, size, and variety of these groups has increased dramatically in the past decade.<sup>28</sup> RTT and I3 represented a coming-out party of



sorts for these groups, and an opportunity for them to organize around a new federal vision of school reform.

It is one thing for RTT to secure **promises of state action**, another thing for **states to deliver promised action**, and another thing entirely for their **action to result in improvements in educational outcomes**.

**State Policy.** While shifts in state-level education rhetoric and politics—and promises of future reform—can be important, they should be distinguished from *actual* changes in state policy. To what extent has RTT secured significant legislative or executive enactments that are likely to endure over time and result in educational improvement? The design of RTT hoped to drive state policy changes at several different junctures: in the run-up to the submission of applications (in both rounds), in the immediate wake of the application process, and over the longer term as winners continue to implement the reforms outlined in their applications and these reforms are taken up in other states.

The Department of Education established a number of criteria that states had to meet to even be eligible to apply for RTT funds, and these requirements have had a major effect on state school reform efforts, independent of the specific grant proposals that the states submitted. Among the fourteen criteria for RTT eligibility were requirements that states not have caps on the number of charter schools permitted to operate and not have a firewall preventing the linking of student-achievement data with individual teacher information. Forty states (plus D.C.) submitted applications during the first round of the competition, and fifteen of them (including some strong union states like California, Michigan, and Ohio) passed laws or revised regulations before submitting their applications to improve their chances of winning.

Estimates of state policy changes made in the name of RTT vary widely. The Obama administration claims that

thirty-four states have changed laws or policies “to improve education” since the competition began.<sup>29</sup> Democrats for Education Reform has declared that “Race to the Top has effected more positive change in state and local education laws and policies than any other federal education program in history.”<sup>30</sup> By their calculation, at least twenty-three states have made changes to their education policies, and at least thirteen states, including Illinois and New York, have altered laws or policies to expand the number of charter schools. In addition, several states, including Michigan and Massachusetts, passed new laws allowing the state to intervene in poorly performing schools and districts.<sup>31</sup>

Critics have pointed out, however, that many of these state policy changes appear insignificant upon closer inspection. The Center for Education Reform (a charter proponent) has noted, for example, that while the Department of Education claims fifteen states raised caps and strengthened laws related to charter schools, most of these changes were minor (small increases in the cap) and did not address more fundamental restraints on charter growth, such as authorizing and funding. Jeanne Allen, president of the center, concluded that she saw only “modest improvements” in state charter policies, noting, “It’s not like any of them hit a home run.”<sup>32</sup> Charter advocates believe that the disappointing result stemmed from the low point total for charters in the competition (forty out of a total of five hundred points) and the watering down of the administration’s original RTT proposal to permit not just charter schools but “other innovative schools” to count.<sup>33</sup>

As a result, assessments of RTT’s overall impact vary widely, sometimes even within the same think tank. Thomas B. Fordham Institute vice president Mike Petrilli declared RTT’s round-two results a “disastrous outcome” and the competition on the whole “a big flop.” “The lofty rhetoric of the Race to the Top,” he wrote, “has turned to farce.”<sup>34</sup> Fordham president Chester E. Finn Jr., in contrast, concluded that “RTT mostly got it right.” He remarked that “with a relatively small (by federal standards) amount of money, [Duncan] has catalyzed a large amount of worthwhile education-reform activity in a great many places. And the directions in which he has bribed the system to move are important directions to move in.”<sup>35</sup> Louisiana Schools superintendent Paul Pastorek, whose state was a high-profile loser in the competition, nonetheless lauded its approach. “Creating a competitive fund of money for people who want to do the right thing,” he said, “has already proven to be effective. People have changed their laws and changed their mindsets. While we were working on passing a value-added law prior to RTT, the competitive grant incentivized us to accelerate our push.”<sup>36</sup>



Two of the most important accomplishments of RTT over the long haul are likely to be more robust state student-data systems and the adoption of common academic standards and assessments. These are crucial pieces of educational infrastructure whose absence has had a deleterious effect on efforts to make schools more transparent and accountable. Three different consortia are competing for the \$350 million in RTT funding set aside for the development of next-generation assessments. Opposition to national standards has traditionally been stiff, but by encouraging states to sign on as part of their RTT applications—and leaving the development of the standards themselves to the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers—the Obama administration was able to get forty-eight states to sign on to the Common Core State Standards Initiative. As of August 25, a majority of states (thirty-six) had formally adopted the actual standards that were produced, and more are expected to do so.

Some observers, however, have cautioned that making the common core a prominent part of RTT may ultimately make it harder to convince conservative state legislators or board of education members to sign off on the standards. Virginia and Texas, for example, have announced that they will not adopt the standards and cited them as a major reason for their decision to not participate in RTT.<sup>37</sup> And skeptics note that while getting widespread adoption of common standards is a significant accomplishment, the impact of the standards will ultimately be determined by the speed and rigor with which they are integrated into instructional practice. Finn, for example, wonders, “For those states that don’t get Race to the Top funding, how energized will they be about implementing the standards they’ve adopted? States are broke, and putting these things in practice properly and quickly isn’t cheap or easy or politically painless.”<sup>38</sup>

This is a potential problem, of course, for all the pledges and policy changes made in RTT applications. It remains to be seen if state enthusiasm for undertaking the difficult and contentious work of reform will persist for states that do not win an RTT grant or once the grants run out. The key question here is whether RTT can initiate a self-sustaining cycle of reform in states—and this is where the effort to shift the political discourse becomes so important, as do the elements of RTT that are less easily undone. While states can go back and loosen a teacher-tenure statute, for example, it may well be harder (or less politically or economically feasible) for states to undo a longitudinal data system once created. The architects of RTT clearly hope that many of the reforms enacted by states generate

policy feedbacks that lock them in over time. But despite all the talk about RTT creating a revolution in education, the program’s success will ultimately depend on the political will of state policymakers, the capacity of district administrators to implement RTT effectively, and the ability of the Department of Education to hold states to their commitments. This is the fundamental duality of RTT—it seeks transformation but must do so in the short term largely through existing political and institutional constraints; it hopes to build new state capacity but must do so while overcoming existing capacity limitations. It is one thing for RTT to secure promises of state action, another thing for states to deliver promised action, and another thing entirely for their action to result in improvements in educational outcomes.

## **A Case Study: RTT Impact on Teacher Accountability.**

Perhaps no issue better represents RTT’s potential to drive changes in discourse, politics, and policy than teacher accountability. Research has long documented how existing state teacher evaluation, tenure, and dismissal policies are dysfunctional and have impeded efforts to improve teacher quality and student achievement.<sup>39</sup> The norm across the country is to give teachers tenure automatically after three years in the classroom, with no meaningful evaluation of their teaching effectiveness and little risk of their being fired during their career no matter how ineffective they are.<sup>40</sup> And because the least-effective teachers are concentrated in the poorest schools, the cost of leaving them in the classroom has been borne disproportionately by the most disadvantaged students. In 2008, the National Council on Teacher Quality gave forty-one states failing grades for their tenure policies, while nine states were given a grade of D; not a single state in the country had even “partly” met the goal of developing a “meaningful” tenure decision-making process. To effectively weed out poorly performing teachers, both the tenure-granting and tenure-revocation processes ultimately depend on the underlying district teacher-evaluation systems, but these were also deeply flawed. In a report called *The Widget Effect*, for example, the New Teacher Project lamented “our pervasive and longstanding failure to recognize and respond to variations in the effectiveness of our teachers.”<sup>41</sup>

Despite the abundant evidence that major evaluation and tenure reform was necessary, virtually no state had taken serious, sustained action before RTT.<sup>42</sup> Politically, evaluation and tenure had long been considered the “third rail” of education politics because unions vigorously fought efforts to weaken job protections for teachers—which, in



any event, were buried in local collective bargaining contracts seen as beyond the appropriate reach of federal policy. Obama and Duncan changed the politics around teacher accountability by repeatedly highlighting the dysfunction in our teacher-evaluation and tenure systems, shining a bright light on an issue that had long received inadequate attention.<sup>43</sup> Their use of the bully pulpit and the high-profile debates in state legislatures over tenure reform have brought much greater media coverage to the issue than ever before. A search of Lexis-Nexis for the terms “teacher tenure” and “reform” reveals that major newspapers have run 222 stories on the topic since 2009 after running only 559 stories total during the preceding thirty-seven years (1971 to 2008).<sup>44</sup>

## The **long-term impact** of a **Democratic president** **taking on the unions over** **teacher accountability and** **school reform** may prove to be one of the most important political legacies of RTT.

This rhetorical push, combined with the financial incentives of RTT, has prompted an unprecedented wave of state teacher-evaluation and tenure reforms.<sup>45</sup> Teacher-effectiveness reforms constitute the single biggest category of possible points (28 percent) in the RTT program, and Duncan highlighted their importance to the successful applications of round-one winners Delaware and Tennessee. An additional requirement for states that received stimulus funds was that all districts publish teacher and principal evaluation information online; the availability of such information has already caused a firestorm in Los Angeles and has the potential to keep the teacher-accountability issue on the agenda for a long time.<sup>46</sup> To even be eligible to apply for RTT grants, states could not have any law that created a firewall prohibiting student-achievement data from being used in teacher evaluations. Six states removed such firewalls in response to RTT, including California, Indiana, and Wisconsin, and eleven states have gone further and enacted legislation that *requires* student-achievement data to be used in teacher-evaluation or tenure decisions.

While a number of states initiated major overhauls of their teacher-evaluation and tenure systems in response to RTT, others such as Ohio and D.C. used the momentum created by RTT to bring preexisting but stalled efforts to completion. In Ohio, outgoing Democratic governor Ted Strickland secured major changes to the state’s teacher-evaluation and tenure statutes in 2009. The legislation created a new multitiered teacher-licensure process, established a teacher residency program with performance monitoring for new teachers, extended the probationary period before tenure from three years to seven, and instructed the State Educators Standards Board to develop a model value-added teacher-evaluation system incorporating student-achievement data. Most significantly, the law made it easier to dismiss ineffective tenured teachers by streamlining due-process protections and moving from a “gross immorality” and “gross inefficiency” standard to a “good and just cause” standard.

After a long stalemate with the local American Federation of Teachers (AFT) affiliate in Washington, D.C., then-chancellor Michelle Rhee successfully negotiated a revolutionary new collective bargaining contract that completely overhauled the way the city evaluates and compensates teachers and gave her greatly expanded power to fire ineffective teachers. The *Washington Post* credited RTT and “the extraordinary pace of change in national education policy” it inspired with helping create conditions in which the reform contract was possible. “When negotiations started in late 2007,” the *Post* stated, “the concepts embedded in Rhee’s contract and evaluation proposals—performance pay linked to test score growth, weakening of seniority and tenure—were far more politically polarizing. As both sides hammered away at the bargaining table, these issues were swept into the mainstream by the Obama administration.”<sup>47</sup> In July 2010, Rhee used this new power to fire 241 teachers—or roughly 4 percent of the teachers in the district—for poor performance. Rhee also used Impact, D.C.’s new teacher-evaluation system, to identify 737 other instructors as “minimally effective” and gave them one year to improve their performance or face dismissal. She said that over the next two years, “a not-insignificant number of folks will be moved out of the system for poor performance.”<sup>48</sup>

Colorado also passed perhaps the nation’s most sweeping state evaluation and reform law in 2010. It requires teachers to be evaluated annually, with the majority of their rating based on their students’ academic progress. Beginning teachers have to demonstrate they have boosted student achievement for three straight years to earn tenure, and tenured teachers can be fired if they do not raise



student achievement for two consecutive years.<sup>49</sup> Delaware also enacted major tenure reform, and a high-profile effort to abolish tenure in Florida passed the state legislature but was vetoed by Governor Charlie Crist. In addition, a number of other states (such as New Jersey) have announced plans to reform their teacher-evaluation and tenure statutes.

Even as RTT pushed policy changes at the state level, its impact was also felt at the district level as superintendents took advantage of the new teacher-accountability and school-restructuring provisions to undertake more aggressive interventions in chronically underperforming schools. Emblematic of these efforts was the decision in March 2010 by a Rhode Island superintendent to fire the entire teaching staff at the troubled Central Falls High School when the local union would not agree to her proposed reforms.<sup>50</sup> While teachers unions vigorously criticized the move, Obama hailed the mass firings as appropriate and necessary to bring about reform and accountability for closing racial and socioeconomic achievement gaps.<sup>51</sup>

All these examples demonstrate how RTT and the administration's use of the bully pulpit have significantly changed the political dynamics around teacher accountability. They have given political cover and enhanced authority to state political leaders and school administrators to confront powerful interests such as teachers unions on school reform issues in unprecedented ways. Rhode Island commissioner of education Deborah Gist, for example, noted that the union ultimately compromised in Central Falls because "they finally knew that we were serious. Something like this had not ever happened in the state before, and the only thing I can think is that perhaps the first time around they didn't realize we really meant business."<sup>52</sup>

These developments have also paved the way for an important shift in the position of AFT and a more reform-oriented approach to collective bargaining contracts. While the National Education Association (NEA) continues to oppose most evaluation and tenure reforms, AFT president Randi Weingarten acknowledged in an important January 2010 speech that "our system of evaluating teachers has never been adequate." She called for replacing brief teacher observations by principals (which she called a "perfunctory waste of time") with "constructive and robust teacher evaluation" and "the creation of a system that would inform tenure, employment decisions, and due process proceedings." "We recognize," she added, "that too often due process can become a glacial process. We intend to change that." Weingarten hailed the contract negotiated by the New Haven chapter of AFT in October 2009, which limits job protections for teachers in failing schools and includes provisions for performance pay and teacher

evaluation based in part on student growth. More recently, AFT has agreed to major changes in evaluation and tenure policies in contracts in New York City and Washington, D.C., and has endorsed the major overhaul in Colorado. The long-term impact of a Democratic president taking on the unions over teacher accountability and school reform may prove to be one of the most important political legacies of RTT.

While teacher-evaluation reform is a major success story for RTT, it is important to note that changes were enacted only in a minority of states (seventeen), and the ultimate impact there remains uncertain. In some states, promised changes have yet to be enacted, while in others many of the crucial details concerning new evaluation systems were left to be worked out later by commissions. Many of the policies related to teacher accountability remain embedded in local collective bargaining contracts—which have proved notoriously hard to change in practice, even in the face of political pressure and changes in state statutes. As a result, Sandi Jacobs of the National Council on Teacher Quality concluded that "we are pleased with the considerable activity at the state level, but most of it has not been ground breaking."<sup>53</sup> Teacher evaluation thus demonstrates both the potential and the limitations of using a competitive grant program to drive state reform. Even on an issue that was widely seen as in need of major overhaul—and received both the most points in the competition and probably the greatest media coverage—RTT was unable to push the majority of states to enact reform.

## Part III

### The Future of RTT: Lessons Learned and Challenges Ahead

#### Implementation and State Capacity Gaps.

The history of federal education policy is replete with well-intentioned and initially promising attempts to effect positive change on schools, but it remains extraordinarily difficult to drive change from the national level all the way down to the classroom level. For RTT to succeed, the federal program must lead to state policy changes, state policy changes must result in changes in district practice, changes in district practice must change the behavior of principals and teachers at the school level, and changes at the school level must deliver improved student performance. As a result, two factors are essential to determining the ultimate impact of RTT: the vigor and effectiveness of state and district implementation efforts, and the oversight and accountability provided by the federal Department of Education.<sup>54</sup>



As noted above, politics and capacity challenges are likely to constrain both state and federal implementation efforts. At the state level, federal officials must be wary of two very different scenarios: good-faith efforts by states that try to implement their RTT plans but fall short, and bad-faith efforts by states that engage in symbolic compliance designed to secure federal funds with minimal change rather than meaningful reform. Commitment alone may not be sufficient, for, as Richard Elmore has argued, states suffer from a “capacity gap” that undermines their ability to monitor and enforce mandates and provide technical guidance. As Elmore writes:

What we have discovered is that accountability for performance requires substantial investments in organizational capacity: state departments of education need the capacity to select, implement, and monitor sound measures of performance; schools need support in developing internal coherence and instructional capacity; schools and districts need help in creating reasonable, diverse ways of assessing student learning; and teachers need support in acquiring the knowledge and skill required to reach larger numbers of students with more demanding content.<sup>55</sup>

Pastorek, for example, has expressed concern that the Department of Education and many states have been insufficiently attuned to these capacity deficits. He said, “I think some [states] may be underestimating the resources and energy that these kinds of initiatives require . . . state Departments of Education are not designed to implement these programs.”<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, a recent study by the Data Quality Campaign found that state data systems are woefully inadequate; only eleven states nationwide (and only four of the twelve RTT winners) have all the components it deems essential.<sup>57</sup> And many states and districts have little experience implementing some of the reform approaches contained in their RTT applications. A report by the Center on Education Policy found that only 12 percent of the country’s school districts had implemented any of the four school-turnaround models pushed by RTT.<sup>58</sup>

Leadership turnover is another challenge that will affect states’ ability to effectively implement their RTT plans. A central element of the political strategy behind RTT was to empower state actors, such as governors and school chiefs, who appear more willing to embrace accountability and innovation in education than state legislatures have historically been. While this approach has paid some initial dividends, it carries risk over the long haul because, unlike state legislators, governors do not tend to be in office very long, and reform efforts will likely stall

in the transition to new executives with new agendas. Several of the states that won RTT grants (including Rhode Island, Ohio, and Florida) now have new governors as a result of the November elections, and Mayor Adrian Fenty and Rhee have departed from their posts in D.C.

The **crucial issue to watch** will be whether department **officials are willing to withhold federal funds from states that fail** to uphold the promises in their RTT applications.

The problem of “trojan horse” applications presents an even more difficult challenge for the Department of Education. States have a long history of being very good at manipulating the system to ensure formal compliance with the letter of the law while minimizing the changes required in state education systems.<sup>59</sup> The federal government struggled mightily to combat such gamesmanship with state accountability plans under NCLB, as Manna has noted.<sup>60</sup> District efforts to circumvent compliance with state mandates are a further challenge, as the debates over memoranda of understanding and implementing the Obama administration’s new school-restructuring approaches have revealed.<sup>61</sup> The economic crisis and related state budget crunches created an urgent need for federal education funds, but, when these economic pressures decline, states and districts may be less willing to carry out major school reforms. In Massachusetts and Ohio, for example, as the full effort and cost to implement RTT reforms has become clearer, a number of schools and districts that initially signed on have backed out.<sup>62</sup>

**Limited Department of Education Enforcement Tools.** This raises the central issue of enforcement: while RTT offered the Department of Education new ways of delivering grant money to states, it did not provide the department with new tools for enforcement. The Department of Education has long lacked the staff, resources, and technical expertise to provide sustained supervision and guidance of state compliance with federal



education programs. While its programs and grant expenditures have grown dramatically in the past thirty years, the department itself has not. As its website notes, “In fact, with a planned fiscal year 2010 level of 4,199, ED’s staff is 44 percent below the 7,528 employees who administered Federal education programs in several different agencies in 1980, when the Department was created.”<sup>63</sup> Ironically then, even as RTT seeks to expand states’ administrative capacity to implement education reform, it may be undone by the lack of adequate administrative capacity at the national level.

Furthermore, one of the explicit purposes of RTT was to shift federal policy from the punitive (stick) approach of the Bush administration to a more incentive-driven (carrot) approach. Weiss, for example, has talked about moving away from “compliance monitoring” and toward “relentless implementation,” but it is unclear what this really means in practice and in particular how the Department of Education will handle states that actively or passively flout federal goals. And of course, the more aggressive federal enforcement efforts are, the more they may drive states toward a compliance mentality that can undermine creativity and innovation.

The crucial issue to watch will be whether department officials are willing to withhold federal funds from states that fail to uphold the promises in their RTT applications. The Alliance for Excellent Education cautioned, however, that “there is limited accountability for the implementation of ARRA’s RTT funds requirements. The regulations do not specify penalties for failure to faithfully implement their state plans.”<sup>64</sup> RTT guidelines are indeed vague on accountability, declaring only that “states must adhere to a fund drawdown schedule that is tied to meeting these goals, timelines, budgets, and annual targets. The Department will review each state’s performance . . . through (at a minimum) annual reports and ongoing dialogue.”<sup>65</sup> States have four years to implement their plans and spend their RTT funds.<sup>66</sup> But a recent report by the Department of Education inspector general found that the department struggled to get complete, accurate, and transparent information from states about how they spent stimulus funds.<sup>67</sup> The complexity and diversity of state RTT plans present an even more formidable oversight task, and withholding federal education funds is notoriously difficult to do politically—which is why it has almost never been done.

**Policy Learning and Dissemination of Successful Reform Models.** Given that only twelve states received RTT grants, another crucial issue will

be the extent to which the program can be leveraged to drive reform in losing states. Governors and school chiefs in some losing states, such as New Jersey, Colorado, and Connecticut, have indicated that they will charge ahead with the plans outlined in their RTT applications;<sup>68</sup> some have indicated that their plans are unlikely to be enacted; and many others (such as Louisiana) have declared that while they will work to implement their plans, the rate of progress is likely to be much slower absent RTT cash. It will be essential for the Department of Education to disseminate information about what reforms work and create incentives for other states to adopt them.

To that end, the federal Institute of Education Sciences should fund systematic research on the effectiveness of specific state reform strategies adopted under RTT as well as on the competitive grant approach as a whole.<sup>69</sup> The focus of these studies should not only be the impact of reform on student achievement—data that should be more accessible given the adoption of common standards and assessments—but also state capacity and whether states took steps to increase their ability to support district reform plans. In June 2010, the Department of Education announced its intention to sponsor an “impact evaluation” of both RTT and the School Improvement Grant that should facilitate this effort.<sup>70</sup> Andrew Rotherham has sensibly urged Duncan to “convene a commission to study and report on what can be learned from the federal competitions so far and, more importantly, what can be learned from other high-stakes competitions in the public and non-governmental sectors.”<sup>71</sup>

In addition, one of the promising developments to emerge during the RTT application process was an increase in interstate collaboration around school reform. This occurred informally as well as during the Department of Education’s technical-assistance meetings and the multi-state consortia for common standards and assessments.<sup>72</sup> The Department of Education should continue to nurture interstate collaboration and policy learning and the institutions that facilitate it.

## Reviewer Selection and Application Review Process.

Serious concerns have been raised about the quality of RTT application reviewers and the degree to which they were in sync with the administration’s specified policy priorities and with each other.<sup>73</sup> The broad way in which the reviewer conflict-of-interest provision was written appears to have excluded many of the people with the kind of experience and expertise necessary to understand state applications in a deep and nuanced way. This should be changed



for future rounds of RTT or similar programs. In addition, efforts should be made to enhance the training of reviewers to reduce inter-rater reliability problems, and a process should be developed to address outlier scores—perhaps by tossing them out or bringing in additional reviewers.

**States have long sought to maximize their federal dollars** while minimizing federal control, and they have proved extraordinarily adept at **finding ways to redirect** the river of **federal funding toward state priorities and away from meaningful reform.**

## Comprehensive versus Targeted Reform.

RTT graded states in terms of the comprehensiveness of their reform agendas and required them to address a large number of policy issues in one fell swoop. This makes sense given the interrelated nature of many reforms, such as assessments, data systems, and teacher evaluations. As Sara Mead has noted, however, an “important lesson in RTT is the peril of trying to cram too many different reform focuses into a single competitive grant competition.”<sup>74</sup> She believes that RTT’s “diffuse focus” across multiple and conflicting reform priorities may explain some of the strange application-scoring results as well as increase the implementation challenge for states going forward. As a result, federal officials should consider focusing future grant competitions more narrowly on single policy goals, as the common-assessment program and Teacher Incentive Fund have done. Doing so may encourage state officials, application reviewers, and federal administrators to focus on reforms that are more discrete, transparent, and manageable from an implementation standpoint.

**Political Opposition and RTT Fade.** One key factor influencing reform is whether RTT ends up being a one-shot deal or a multi-round competition. This will have a major impact on state behavior because the best way to incentivize states to keep their RTT promises in one competition is to make their fidelity affect their chances in subsequent competitions. It is significant, then, that the Obama administration has stated that it wants RTT to be a permanent part of federal education policy. To this end, it recently requested that Congress allocate \$1.35 billion for another RTT competition and that districts have their own competition alongside states.<sup>75</sup> The administration also called for the expanded use of competitive grants in ESEA, which would attach them to a much larger pot of money and expand their influence dramatically. Weiss has observed that

formula funding is vital to getting federal money to particular programs that serve children who might otherwise be under-supported . . . [but] the downside of large formula funding programs is that they can lead to complacency as opposed to excellence, because, for example, whether a high school is graduating 90 percent of its kids or 40 percent of its kids, it still gets its funding. With Race to the Top, states win funding based on performance and outcomes. We think it’s an important part of the way that funding needs to happen in the future.<sup>76</sup>

However, the recent kerfuffle over the Obey amendment’s plan to cut RTT to pay for the Edjobs bill and proposals to fund RTT at significantly lower levels than the president’s request speak to the tenuous support for RTT within Congress.<sup>77</sup> RTT is under tremendous political fire for three different reasons: first, because many do not like the particular policy reforms RTT promotes; second, because many congressmen do not like competitive grants since they involve losers; and third, because Congress does not like to see discretionary power over federal education funding and policy shift from the legislative branch to the executive. Ultimately, it is the same feature of competitive grant programs—the fact that they have winners and losers—that makes them both effective at driving reform and difficult to sustain politically. This is why formula grant programs have historically been the dominant mechanism for the distribution of federal funds in education and other areas. It is also why the original ESEA—which was intended to be a redistributive program that focused money on high-poverty areas—ended up as a largely distributive program that sent federal money to virtually every congressional



district. Outside of Congress, there has also been serious push-back from the NEA, which voted “no confidence” in RTT at its 2010 meeting, as well as from losing states and some civil rights groups.

Even if future RTTs are authorized, the pressure to water down the reform elements of the program and loosen federal guidelines will likely be intense. It will be important—but difficult—for the administration to hold the line on politically controversial policies. The experience with the initial RTT draft regulations issued by the Department of Education in July 2009 is illustrative of the danger here, as the administration made changes in several areas in response to union push-back. Guidelines for key issues such as teacher evaluations, charter caps, and school restructuring were modified in ways that led the *Washington Post* to conclude that “the draft regulations have been weakened.”<sup>78</sup>

## Conclusion

RTT has had a significant impact on the national political discourse around education and pushed many states to enact important policy changes. Despite its imperfections, it has clearly generated considerable momentum behind education reform in the United States and pressed states into very public deliberations over thorny education reforms that have long been resisted, such as changing teacher evaluation and tenure. By pushing these issues into the spotlight, RTT has spurred new conversations and stirred the political pot around education, helping forge new alliances and creating political cover for reformers in state legislatures. The focus on competition has created a “coalition of the willing” by enlisting states with proven track records of reform or ambitious reform agendas to serve as role models and laboratories for other states. The key question is how the federal government can sustain this momentum and the reforms it generates over the long term, particularly if RTT ends.

The ultimate impact of this new competitive grant model will be constrained by two crucial factors that have remained largely unchanged in federal education policy: the politics of intergovernmental relations and the limited oversight and enforcement capacity of states and the Department of Education. Despite the new approach embodied in RTT, states will continue to seek ways to circumvent federal mandates and goals to carve out maximum flexibility. States have long sought to maximize their federal dollars while minimizing federal control, and they have proved extraordinarily adept at finding ways to redirect the river of federal

funding toward state priorities and away from meaningful reform. We should not expect this dynamic to change now, even in states that are relatively well aligned with the Obama administration’s reform agenda.

Federalism and the lack of national constitutional authority to directly impose school reform on the states have greatly complicated politics and policymaking in American education, as they have forced the federal government to pursue its goals for school reform indirectly through the grant-in-aid system and state education agencies. This intergovernmental relationship in education is both cooperative and coercive, making it complex and contingent on broader political forces. The relationship has a cooperative element because the Department of Education must rely on state education agencies as a conduit for federal spending and as the implementers of federal policies on the ground in school districts. It is also coercive, however, as federal spending and policies have increasingly been used to push states to undertake changes that are politically unpopular—with middle- and upper-class parents as well as with teachers unions and local school leaders—and that they would not have undertaken in the absence of federal pressure. The implementation of NCLB has reinforced that there is a major difference between a state’s pro forma “compliance” with federal mandates and the enactment of real “change,” and an even bigger gap between state, district, or school “change” and meaningful “improvement.” In education generally—and particularly in the pursuit of certain educational goals—the “spirit” of compliance matters more than the measurable “facts” of compliance.

Political scientists Paul Peterson, Kenneth Wong, and Barry Rabe observed twenty-five years ago that federal education policy tends to go through cycles of overreach and consolidation.<sup>79</sup> From this perspective, RTT may best be understood as a smart attempt by the Obama administration to respond to the failures of NCLB and adapt federal policy to a role more commensurate with limited federal power and administrative resources. RTT’s competitive grant program represents a promising new approach to using federal funds to drive school reform that may well prove more effective than traditional federal formula grant programs. RTT seeks to change the political discourse around education, provide political cover for state reformers, and construct new administrative capacity at the federal and state levels that can support the implementation of new reforms once enacted.

But we should remain realistic in our expectations of what RTT can accomplish; while the program’s approach

may be different from that of earlier federal education programs, many of the political and institutional obstacles to sustaining meaningful reform at the federal and state levels remain largely the same. RTT will struggle to surmount these obstacles in the short term, even as it hopes to transform them over the longer term.

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## Notes

1. See, for example, Heinrich Mintrop and Gail Sunderman, "Predictable Failure of Federal Sanctions-Driven Accountability of School Improvement—and Why We May Retain It Anyway," *Educational Researcher* 38, no. 5 (June 2009): 353–64.
2. David Cohen and Susan Moffit, *The Ordeal of Equality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).
3. The federal reliance on state education agencies (SEAs) has created a serious principal-agent challenge, and the Department of Education has struggled to get SEAs to align state priorities and resources with the ambitious federal educational goals contained in the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 and NCLB. See Paul Manna, "Control, Persuasion, and Educational Accountability: Implementing the No Child Left Behind Act," *Educational Policy* 20, no. 3 (2006): 471–94. In part, as Radin and Hawley have observed, this reflects the longstanding vision of the Department of Education as a clientele agency—a grant-making and information-gathering organization—rather than a driver of reform. See Beryl Radin and Willis Hawley, *The Politics of Federal Reorganization: Creating the U.S. Department of Education* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1988), 188. The agency has long lacked the combination of statutory authority, administrative capacity, and political support to implement federal education policies effectively and today remains by far the smallest cabinet-level federal department with only about four thousand employees.
4. For more information on the efforts of states and districts to implement NCLB, see Frederick M. Hess and Chester E. Finn Jr., eds., *No Remedy Left Behind?* (Washington, DC: AEI Press, 2006), available at [www.aei.org/book/902](http://www.aei.org/book/902).
5. Alyson Klein, "Was Race to the Top Authorized?" *Politics K–12*, May 6, 2010.
6. "An Interview with Arne Duncan," *Education Week*, December 2, 2009.
7. The notable exception here was in ending de jure segregation, but this effort was pushed more by the courts than by Congress and the Department of Education.
8. Sara Mead, "Competitive Grants Are Nothing New," *Sara Mead's Policy Notebook*, August 3, 2010, available at [http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/sarameads\\_policy\\_notebook/2010/08/competitive\\_grants\\_are\\_nothing\\_new.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/sarameads_policy_notebook/2010/08/competitive_grants_are_nothing_new.html) (accessed November 19, 2010).
9. U.S. Department of Education, *Race to the Top Guidance and Frequently Asked Questions* (Washington, DC, May 2010), available at [www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/faq.pdf](http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/faq.pdf) (accessed November 19, 2010).
10. Eric Nee, "Q&A: Joanne Weiss," *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Spring 2010, 15, available at [www.ssiireview.org/articles/entry/qa\\_joanne\\_weiss](http://www.ssiireview.org/articles/entry/qa_joanne_weiss) (accessed November 19, 2010).
11. Ibid., 14.
12. Andrew Smarick, AEI *Education Stimulus Watch*, Special Report 2 (September 2009), available at [www.aei.org/paper/100044](http://www.aei.org/paper/100044).
13. Eric Nee, "Q&A: Joanne Weiss," 15.
14. The prominent role played by foundations and consultants in RTT—and their impact on the outcome of the competition—is another cause for concern. The Gates Foundation, for example, provided \$250,000 in financial support to twenty-four states (more than half of all RTT applicants), and nine of the twelve winners had Gates funding. And a variety of groups such as Wireless Generation and Mass Insight advised states on how to craft winning applications. There are two separate potential problems here. The first is that consultants might be able to "spin" state applications and presentations in ways that skew the results away from worthier

states. The second issue is that the role of foundations and consultants—many of whom were involved in multiple state applications—may create a kind of group-think among states that reduces the amount of variation and innovation across state reform efforts.

15. Paul Manna, "Control, Persuasion, and Educational Accountability: Implementing the No Child Left Behind Act."
16. Nancy Mitchell, "How Colorado Lost Race to the Top," *Education Week*, August 27, 2010.
17. Sean Cavanagh, "Alabama Chief Complains about Race to the Top," *State EdWatch*, September 1, 2010, available at [http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/state\\_edwatch/2010/09/alabama\\_schools\\_chief\\_complains\\_to\\_duncan\\_about\\_race\\_to\\_top.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/state_edwatch/2010/09/alabama_schools_chief_complains_to_duncan_about_race_to_top.html) (accessed November 19, 2010).
18. Sam Dillon, "Education Grant Effort Faces Late Opposition," *New York Times*, January 19, 2010.
19. Amanda Paulson, "Race to the Top Losers: Why Did Louisiana and Colorado Fail?" *Christian Science Monitor*, August 24, 2010, available at [www.csmonitor.com/USA/Education/2010/0824/Race-to-the-Top-losers-Why-did-Louisiana-and-Colorado-fail](http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Education/2010/0824/Race-to-the-Top-losers-Why-did-Louisiana-and-Colorado-fail) (accessed November 19, 2010).
20. "Race to the Top Itself Needs Some Reform," *Washington Post*, August 27, 2010; and Michele McNeil, "Racing for an Early Edge," *Education Week*, July 9, 2009.
21. Alyson Klein, "California Actions on Race to the Top Scrutinized," *Education Week*, September 2, 2009.
22. "Continue the Race," *New York Times*, August 28, 2010.
23. Sean Cavanagh, "Race to the Top Now Faces Acid Test," *Education Week*, August 31, 2010.
24. Sean Cavanagh, "NJ Clings to Agenda Despite Race to Top Loss," *Education Week*, September 7, 2010.
25. As quoted in "9 States, DC Receive Race to the Top Education Funds," *USA Today*, August 28, 2010.
26. Jeffrey Henig, "Mayors, Governors, and Presidents: The New Education Executives and the End of Educational Exceptionalism," *Peabody Journal of Education* 84, no. 3 (July 2009): 283–99.
27. Richard Lee Colvin and Suzanne Kubach, "The Race to Reform: How Education Reform Advocates Are Leveraging Race to the Top" (Policy Innovators in Education white paper, Minneapolis, MN, April 1, 2010), available at [www.pie-network.org/c/document\\_library/get\\_file?uid=92033314-337c-434e-80c6-a137ead3f57d&groupId=10457](http://www.pie-network.org/c/document_library/get_file?uid=92033314-337c-434e-80c6-a137ead3f57d&groupId=10457) (accessed November 19, 2010).
28. Stephen Brill, "The Teachers Unions Last Stand," *New York Times*, June 6, 2010.
29. Sean Cavanagh, "Race to the Top Now Faces Acid Test."
30. Democrats for Education Reform, "Race to the Top Background," July 2010, available at <http://swiftandchangeable.org/media/Who%20We%20Are/DFER.rhetoricreality.pdf> (accessed December 6, 2010).
31. Stephanie Banchemo, "Education Contest Yields 18 Finalists," *Wall Street Journal*, July 28, 2010.
32. Erik Robelen, "State Legislatures Wrestle with Charter Laws," *Education Week*, August 3, 2009.
33. "Tall Tales," *Edspresso*, available at [www.edspresso.com/index.php/2010/08/tall-tales](http://www.edspresso.com/index.php/2010/08/tall-tales) (accessed November 19, 2010).
34. Michael Petrilli, "A Big Flop on Race to the Top," *Education Gadfly*, August 26, 2010.
35. Chester E. Finn Jr., "RTT Mostly Got It Right," *Education Gadfly*, August 26, 2010.
36. Frederick M. Hess, "Louisiana Schools Chief Paul Pastorek Reflects on RTT," *Rick Hess Straight Up*, August 27, 2010, available at [http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/rick\\_hess\\_straight\\_up/2010/08/straight\\_up\\_conversation\\_louisiana\\_schools\\_chief\\_paul\\_pastorek\\_reflects\\_on\\_rtt.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/rick_hess_straight_up/2010/08/straight_up_conversation_louisiana_schools_chief_paul_pastorek_reflects_on_rtt.html) (accessed November 19, 2010).
37. David Harrison, "Did Race to the Top Help or Hurt the Push for a Common Curriculum?" *Stateline*, August 25, 2010.
38. Stephen Sawchuk, "More Than Two-Thirds of States Adopt Core Standards," *Education Week*, August 6, 2010.
39. A 2006 Brookings Institution report, for example, concluded that "schools could substantially increase student achievement by denying tenure to the least effective teachers." See Robert Gordon, Thomas Kane, and Douglas Staiger, *Identifying Effective Teachers Using Performance on the Job* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2006), 13.
40. Data from the U.S. Department of Education's 2007–2008 *Schools and Staffing Survey* reveal that, on average, school districts dismiss or decline to renew only

2.1 percent of teachers (tenured and nontenured) for poor performance each year. See Patrick McGuinn, *Ring the Bell for K-12 Teacher Tenure Reform* (Washington, DC: Center for American Progress, February 2010), available at [www.americanprogress.org/issues/2010/02/teacher\\_tenure\\_reform.html](http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2010/02/teacher_tenure_reform.html) (accessed November 19, 2010).

41. Daniel Weisberg, Susan Sexton, Jennifer Mulhern, and David Keeling, *The Widget Effect: Our National Failure to Acknowledge and Act on Differences in Teacher Effectiveness* (New York: New Teacher Project, 2009).

42. In 2009, Sandi Jacobs of the National Center for Teacher Quality reported that “no state has really done anything to ensure that tenure is meaningful. A handful of states have longer than average probationary periods before tenure is awarded, but none of those has any sort of meaningful criteria—just a longer timeline. We’ve found just two states—Iowa and New Mexico—that have some rudimentary requirements, but these are just first steps toward connecting tenure to effectiveness” (personal correspondence with the author, August 12, 2009). Barbara Thompson, the project leader for teaching quality at the Education Commission of the States, agreed with this assessment, noting that she saw efforts to link tenure to teaching effectiveness “getting shot down all the time” (telephone interview with the author, August 12, 2009).

43. Stephen Sawchuk, “Duncan Presses NEA on Merit Pay, Tenure,” *Education Week*, July 2, 2009.

44. Analysis conducted by the author in August 2010. These data are only meant to be illustrative. While it is impossible to quantify the impact of this effort on shifting the discourse, it appears to have had a significant effect. Timothy Daly, president of the New Teacher Project, observed, “The big picture is that Race to the Top has focused the nation on the big questions in public education in a way that we rarely have been. We haven’t focused much before on having good evaluations. Now a lot of states are saying, ‘We’re going to do that.’ And that’s huge.” See Sam Dillon, “Education Grant Effort Faces Late Opposition.”

45. Stephen Sawchuk, “States Strive to Overhaul Teacher Tenure,” *Education Week*, April 5, 2010; and Learning Point Associates, “Emerging Trends Reflected in State Phase I Race to the Top Applications,” June 2010, available at [www.learningpt.org/pdfs/RttT\\_State\\_Legislation.pdf](http://www.learningpt.org/pdfs/RttT_State_Legislation.pdf) (accessed December 6, 2010).

46. Leslie Brody, “Districts to Disclose Teacher Ratings,” *Star Ledger*, September 23, 2010; and Jason Felch, Jason Song, and Doug Smith, “Grading the Teachers,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 14, 2010.

47. Bill Turque, “D.C. Teachers Union Ratifies Contract, Basing Pay on Results Not Seniority,” *Washington Post*, June 3, 2010. Kurt Schmoke, the mediator between the union and the district in the D.C. contract negotiations, added that RTT helped get the union to sign on to the new reform contract because “the ideas have gained currency at the national level. What was seen as bold is now reform, not revolution.”

48. The *Washington Post* observed, “Dismissals for performance are exceedingly rare in D.C. schools—and in school systems nationwide. Friday’s firings mark the beginning of Rhee’s bid to make student achievement a high-stakes proposition for teachers, establishing job loss as a possible consequence of poor classroom results. . . . They also place the school system at the head of a national movement—fostered in part by the Obama administration’s \$4.3 billion ‘Race to the Top’ grant competition—to more rigorously assess teachers’ effectiveness.” See Bill Turque, “Rhee Dismisses 241 DC Teachers; Union Vows to Contest Firings,” *Washington Post*, July 24, 2010.

49. Colleen Slevin, “In Bold Move, Colorado Alters Tenure Reform Rules,” *USA Today*, June 13, 2010.

50. The school had long had poor test scores, failing to make adequate yearly progress under NCLB for seven consecutive years. Rhode Island commissioner of education Deborah Gist identified the school, along with five others in Providence, as a candidate for turnaround under Obama’s School Improvement Grant (SIG) program and ordered its leaders to adopt one of the program’s models. The district superintendent, Frances Gallo, initially chose a transformation model that entailed replacing the principal but retaining most staff. The model called for an extended school day, common planning time for teachers, after-school tutoring, and third-party evaluation of the school’s teaching staff. But after a dispute arose with the local union over the additional requirements and how much teachers would be paid for them, Gallo (backed by the school board) decided to fire the entire staff. The federal SIG program allocates \$3.5 billion to turning around chronically failing schools. Similar federal programs in the past have given states wide discretion in spending the money but have yielded few innovative approaches and have been largely ineffective. As a result, SIG is quite prescriptive, requiring states to choose from

one of four federally sanctioned turnaround models: transformation, turnaround, closure, or charter conversion.

51. Obama declared that “if a school continues to fail its students year after year, if it doesn’t show signs of improvement, then there’s got to be a sense of accountability. And that’s what happened in Rhode Island last week.” Duncan called the move “courageous.” It was striking to see a Democratic president siding against labor—long a key party ally—in such a high-profile dispute; the Central Falls incident received a tremendous amount of national media attention. In the end, under prodding from the Obama administration and the national AFT leadership, both sides returned to the bargaining table and reached a compromise in which teachers agreed to the superintendent’s reform proposals and layoffs were avoided. See Steven Greenhouse and Sam Dillon, “School’s Shake-Up Is Embraced by the President,” *New York Times*, March 6, 2010.

52. Frederick M. Hess, “RI Chief Deb Gist on the Central Falls Deal,” *Rick Hess Straight Up*, May 18, 2010, available at [http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/rick\\_hess\\_straight\\_up/2010/05/straight\\_up\\_conversation\\_ri\\_chief\\_deb\\_gist\\_on\\_the\\_central\\_falls\\_deal.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/rick_hess_straight_up/2010/05/straight_up_conversation_ri_chief_deb_gist_on_the_central_falls_deal.html) (accessed November 19, 2010).

53. Stephanie Banchemo, “Race to the Top Leaves Some Reformers Weary,” *Wall Street Journal*, June 1, 2010.

54. As a report by the Alliance for Excellent Education and the Commission on No Child Left Behind noted, “despite the tremendous promise in the action spurred to date by ARRA and the common standards movement, it is too soon to tell what the full impact of these efforts will be. The success of RTT is largely in the hands of districts that agree to work with states and implement proposed reforms.” See Alliance for Excellent Education and the Commission on No Child Left Behind, *Don’t Leave Accountability Behind: A Call for ESEA Reauthorization* (Washington, DC, February 2010), 1, available at [www.all4ed.org/files/AllianceCommissionReport.pdf](http://www.all4ed.org/files/AllianceCommissionReport.pdf) (accessed November 19, 2010).

55. Richard Elmore, “Unwarranted Intrusion,” *Education Next* 2, no. 1 (Spring 2002), available at <http://educationnext.org/unwarranted-intrusion> (accessed November 19, 2010).

56. Frederick M. Hess, “Louisiana Schools Chief Paul Pastorek Reflects on RTT.”

57. Sarah Sparks, “Race to the Top Winners Face Data System Challenges,” *Education Week*, September 14, 2010.

58. Center on Education Policy, *School Districts’ Perspectives on the Economic Stimulus Package: School Improvement Grants Present Uncertainty and Opportunity* (Washington, DC, August 31, 2010), available at [www.cep-dc.org/document/docWindow.cfm?fuseaction=document.viewDocument&documentid=3138&documentFormatId=4683](http://www.cep-dc.org/document/docWindow.cfm?fuseaction=document.viewDocument&documentid=3138&documentFormatId=4683) (accessed November 19, 2010).

59. As Andrew Smarick of the Fordham Institute noted, “If a state is in it just for the money, it could merely go through the motions, publicly professing support for reforms and meeting minimum requirements but failing to faithfully pursue and implement bold changes.” See Andrew Smarick, “The Full Story on Race to the Top,” *AEI Education Stimulus Watch*, Special Report 3 (March 2010), available at [www.aei.org/paper/100095](http://www.aei.org/paper/100095).

60. Paul Manna, “Control, Persuasion, and Educational Accountability: Implementing the No Child Left Behind Act.”

61. Alyson Klein, “District-State Tension an Issue in Race to the Top,” *Politics K-12*, January 5, 2010; and Staci Hupp, “School Reluctant to Take Reform Money,” *Des Moines Register*, April 18, 2010.

62. See Sean Cavanagh, “Race to the Top Winners Press Ahead, Despite Pushback,” *Education Week*, December 2, 2010; and David Harrison, “School Reform Engine May Be Losing Momentum,” *Stateline*, November 24, 2010, available at <http://stateline.org/live/printable/story?contentId=530992> (accessed December 6, 2010).

63. U.S. Department of Education, “The Federal Role in Education,” available at [www2.ed.gov/about/overview/fed/role.html](http://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/fed/role.html) (accessed November 19, 2010).

64. Alliance for Excellent Education and the Commission on No Child Left Behind, *Don’t Leave Accountability Behind: A Call for ESEA Reauthorization*, 5.

65. U.S. Department of Education, *Race to the Top Guidance and Frequently Asked Questions*.

66. Duncan stated, “Here’s how the process will work: States will draw down their funds as they use the funds to implement their Race to the Top plans. If they are not implementing their plans and hitting the ‘performance measures’ and timelines they proposed in their applications, the Department will take appropriate action. Those actions could include pausing or ceasing States’ draw-downs. Like all other states [sic] money for other sections of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act,



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the Race to the Top states will have to meet the detailed quarterly and annual reporting requirements that apply to all ARRA-funded programs.” See Eliza Krugman, “Accountability in the Race to the Top Program,” *National Journal Expert Blogs: Education*, March 8, 2010, available at <http://education.nationaljournal.com/2010/03/accountability-in-the-race-to.php> (accessed November 19, 2010).

67. Alyson Klein, “IG: ED Could Have Done a Better Job Tracking Stimulus Funds,” Politics K–12, available at [http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2010/09/ig\\_ed\\_could\\_have\\_done\\_a\\_better.html?utm\\_source=feedburner&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=Feed%3A+CampaignK-12+%28Education+Week+Blog%3A+Politics+K-12%29](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2010/09/ig_ed_could_have_done_a_better.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+CampaignK-12+%28Education+Week+Blog%3A+Politics+K-12%29) (accessed November 19, 2010).

68. Sean Cavanagh, “NJ Clings to Agenda Despite Race to Top Loss.”

69. See, for example, Andrew Rotherham, “Sin of Commission?” *Eduwonk Blog*, August 26, 2010, available at [www.eduwonk.com/2010/08/sin-of-commission.html](http://www.eduwonk.com/2010/08/sin-of-commission.html) (accessed November 19, 2010).

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71. Andrew Rotherham, “Sin of Commission?”

72. See, for example, U.S. Department of Education, “Education Stakeholders Forum,” transcript, June 18, 2009, available at [www2.ed.gov/news/av/audio/2009/06/06182009-trans.pdf](http://www2.ed.gov/news/av/audio/2009/06/06182009-trans.pdf) (accessed November 19, 2010).

73. See, for example, New Teacher Project, *The Real Race Begins: Lessons from the First Round of Race to the Top* (Brooklyn, NY, April 2010); and William Peterson and Richard Rothstein, “Let’s Do the Numbers: Department of Education’s Race to the Top Program Offers Only a Muddled Path to the Finish Line” (Economic Policy Institute Briefing Paper #263, Washington, DC, April 20, 2010).

74. Sara Mead, “RTT and the Problem of Trying to Do Too Many Things at Once,” *Sara Mead’s Policy Notebook*, August 30, 2010, available at [http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/sarameads\\_policy\\_notebook/2010/08/race\\_to\\_the\\_top\\_awarded.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/sarameads_policy_notebook/2010/08/race_to_the_top_awarded.html) (accessed November 19, 2010).

75. Michele McNeil, “Obama to Seek \$1.35 Billion Race to Top Expansion,” *Education Week*, January 19, 2010.

76. Eric Nee, “Q&A: Joanne Weiss,” 15.

77. Kendra Marr, “Obama School Plan Riles Lawmakers,” *Politico*, May 14, 2010.

78. “With Race to the Top Rules Set, Allotting Funds Is Now Key,” *Washington Post*, November 13, 2009.

79. Paul Peterson, Barry Rabe, and Kenneth Wong, *When Federalism Works* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1986).