

# RACE TO THE TOP

## North Carolina Report

Year 4: School Year 2013–2014

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U.S. Department of Education  
Washington, DC 20202

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April 2015

# Executive Summary

## Race to the Top overview

On February 17, 2009, President Obama signed into law the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), historic legislation designed to stimulate the economy, support job creation, and invest in critical sectors, including education. ARRA provided \$4.35 billion for the Race to the Top fund, of which approximately \$4 billion was used to fund comprehensive statewide reform grants under the Race to the Top program.<sup>1</sup> In 2010, the U.S. Department of Education (Department) awarded Race to the Top Phase 1 and Phase 2 grants to 11 States and the District of Columbia. The Race to the Top program is a competitive four-year grant program designed to encourage and reward States that are creating the conditions for education innovation and reform; achieving significant improvement in student outcomes, including making substantial gains in student achievement, closing achievement gaps, and improving high school graduation rates; and ensuring students are prepared for success in college and careers. Since the Race to the Top Phase 1 and 2 competitions, the Department has made additional grants under the Race to the Top Phase 3, Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge,<sup>2</sup> and Race to the Top – District<sup>3</sup> competitions.

The Race to the Top program is built on the framework of comprehensive reform in four education reform areas:

- Adopting rigorous standards and assessments that prepare students for success in college and the workplace;
- Building data systems that measure student success and inform teachers and principals how they can improve their practices;
- Recruiting, developing, retaining, and rewarding effective teachers and principals; and
- Turning around the lowest-performing schools.

Since education is a complex system, sustained and lasting instructional improvement in classrooms, schools, local educational agencies (LEAs), and States will not be achieved through piecemeal change. Race to the Top builds on the local contexts of States and LEAs participating in the State's Race to the Top plan (participating LEAs)<sup>4</sup> in the design and implementation of the most effective and innovative approaches that meet the needs of their educators, students, and families.

<sup>1</sup> The remaining funds were awarded under the Race to the Top Assessment program. More information about the Race to the Top Assessment program is available at [www.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-assessment](http://www.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-assessment).

<sup>2</sup> More information on the Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge can be found at <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-earlylearningchallenge/index.html>.

<sup>3</sup> More information on Race to the Top – District can be found at <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-district/index.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Participating local educational agencies (LEAs) are those LEAs that choose to work with the State to implement all or significant portions of the State's Race to the Top plan, as specified in each LEA's Memorandum of Understanding with the State. Each participating LEA that receives funding under Title I, Part A will receive a share of the 50 percent of a State's grant award that the State must subgrant to LEAs, based on the LEA's relative share of Title I, Part A allocations in the most recent year, in accordance with section 14006(c) of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA).

## Race to the Top program review

As part of the Department's commitment to supporting States as they implement ambitious reform agendas, the Department established the Implementation and Support Unit (ISU) in the Office of the Deputy Secretary to administer, among others, the Race to the Top program. The goal of the ISU was to provide assistance to States as they implement unprecedented and comprehensive reforms to improve student outcomes. Consistent with this goal, the Department has developed a Race to the Top program review process that not only addresses the Department's responsibilities for fiscal and programmatic oversight, but is also designed to identify areas in which Race to the Top grantees need assistance and support to meet their goals. Specifically, the ISU worked with Race to the Top grantees to differentiate support based on individual State needs, and helped States work with each other and with experts to achieve and sustain educational reforms that improve student outcomes. In partnership with the ISU, the Reform Support Network (RSN) offers collective and individualized technical assistance and resources to Race to the Top grantees. The RSN's purpose is to support Race to the Top grantees as they implement reforms in education policy and practice, learn from each other, and build their capacity to sustain these reforms.<sup>5</sup> At the end of Year 4, the Department created the Office of State Support to continue to provide support to States across programs as they implement comprehensive reforms. The Office of State Support will administer programs previously administered by the ISU.

Grantees are accountable for the implementation of their approved Race to the Top plans, and the information and data gathered throughout the program review process help to inform the Department's management and support of the Race to the Top grantees, as well as provide appropriate and timely updates to the public on their progress. In the event that adjustments are required to an approved plan, the grantee must submit a formal amendment request to the Department for consideration. States may submit for Department approval amendment requests to a plan and budget, provided such changes do not significantly affect the scope or objectives of the approved plans. In the event that the Department determines that a grantee is not meeting its goals, activities, timelines, budget, or annual targets, or is not fulfilling other applicable requirements, the Department will take appropriate enforcement action(s), consistent with 34 CFR section 80.43 in the Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> More information can be found at <http://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/implementation-support-unit/tech-assist/index.html>.

<sup>6</sup> More information about the Implementation and Support Unit's (ISU's) program review process, State Annual Performance Report (APR) data, and State Scopes of Work can be found at <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/index.html>.

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## State-specific summary report

The Department uses the information gathered during the review process (e.g., through monthly calls, onsite reviews, and Annual Performance Reports (APRs)) to draft State-specific summary reports. The State-specific summary report serves as an assessment of a State's annual Race to the Top implementation. The Year 4 report for Phase 2 grantees highlights successes and accomplishments, identifies challenges, and provides lessons learned from implementation from approximately September 2013 through September 2014. Given that Delaware and Tennessee's initial four-year grant periods ended in June and July 2014, respectively, for Phase 1 grantees, the Year 4 report includes the beginning of the no-cost extension year (Year 5).

## The State's education reform agenda

North Carolina's READY initiative, launched in 2012, drives the State toward ensuring that every student graduates from high school prepared for success in college, career, and adulthood. This framework for reform is reflected in the State's Race to the Top goals through which North Carolina has worked to: (1) ensure its standards and accountability system reflect internationally benchmarked standards; (2) establish advanced data systems that measure student success and inform educator practice; (3) increase teacher and principal effectiveness so that every student has a great teacher and every school has a great principal; and (4) turn around the State's lowest-achieving schools, so that all students receive the support they need to be successful.

North Carolina's Race to the Top grant of \$399,465,769 has supported the State's commitment to "remodel" the public education system to provide every child with great teaching and opportunities to pursue college and a career. In keeping with the terms of the Race to the Top grant, half of North Carolina's grant funds are being used to drive State-level work and the other half of its award supports work aligned with the State's goals in participating LEAs.

## State Years 1 through 3 summary

During the first three years of the grant period, North Carolina made significant progress against its Race to the Top commitments and reform objectives. Early in the grant period the State focused on hiring staff, establishing project management and implementation routines, and gathering stakeholder input. North Carolina also began collaborating with an external evaluator, its Race to the Top Evaluation Team, to gather summative and formative feedback on both individual Race to the Top projects as well as overall grant implementation. Then the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (DPI) began launching projects and providing educators and LEAs with professional development and other support needed to carry out reform initiatives. As implementation proceeded, DPI emphasized continuous improvement of project implementation and provided ongoing support to meet the dynamic needs of educators and LEAs.

To facilitate the transition to rigorous, college- and career-ready standards, North Carolina delivered a variety of supports to build LEA and educator capacity for implementation. In Years 1 and 2 the State focused on preparing educators to implement the updated statewide Standard Course of Study, which is composed of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and the North Carolina Essential Standards for all content areas not covered by the CCSS. Through regional Summer Institutes, the State introduced the full set of new standards and provided guidance documents and curricular materials to local leadership and professional development teams from Race to the Top participating districts and charter schools. In Year 3, educators fully implemented the Standard Course of Study for the first time. DPI continued to build local capacity for the transition to new standards through Summer Institutes and other regional trainings, webinars, online professional development modules, and the development and dissemination of instructional resources.

The Professional Development Initiative framework, established by the State in Year 1, has been integral to North Carolina's efforts to build capacity and support effective implementation of reform initiatives such as new college- and career-ready standards and assessments. Field-based Professional Development Initiative staff known as Regional and Professional Development Leads coordinated with Regional Educational Services Alliances to develop and deliver customized training and support to LEAs across the State through annual cycles of professional development. Supports included job-embedded coaching, online content-based trainings, online communities, and check-ins throughout the school year to assess progress and share best practices.

During Years 1 through 3, the State developed and refined the elements of its evaluation system, the North Carolina Educator Evaluation System (NCEES) and made progress in implementing that system with teachers and principals across the State.<sup>7</sup> The State adopted a statewide student growth model for tested subjects and formally included student growth ratings in teachers' and principals' evaluations. Additionally, the State worked with more than 800 educators from across the State to create the NC Final Exams, designed to assess student growth in non-tested grades and subjects.<sup>8</sup> In Year 3, the State administered the NC Final Exams for the first time and collected the first year of student growth data needed to provide educators with a summative evaluation rating, known in North Carolina as an educator effectiveness status.

In order to deliver technology and data systems to support LEAs as well as classroom instruction, North Carolina invested in two major technology initiatives through its Race to the Top plan – the North Carolina Education Cloud (the Cloud) and Home Base, its integrated Student Information System and Instructional Improvement System (IIS). In school year (SY) 2010-2011 and SY 2011-2012, the State gathered LEA feedback, engaged in design processes, and developed requirements for these initiatives. Some LEAs began to implement shared Cloud services – including email, firewall, and

<sup>7</sup> North Carolina's evaluation system applies to both principals and assistant principals.

<sup>8</sup> NC Final Exams were previously referred to as "Measures of Student Learning" or "Common Exams."

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filtering services – in SY 2011-2012, and additional LEAs utilized these services in SY 2012-2013. During SY 2012-2013, North Carolina awarded contracts to develop the primary components and functionality of Home Base and began the initial roll-out of some components of the system to LEAs in summer 2013.

At the beginning of the grant period, the State identified 118 lowest-achieving schools – representing the lowest-achieving five percent of schools in the State – to which it would provide intensive support through Race to the Top. Those schools initiated implementation of intervention models in SY 2010-2011.<sup>9</sup> Throughout Years 1 through 3, DPI provided customized support to its lowest-achieving schools and LEAs through district, school, and instructional coaching and professional development tailored to the needs of leaders in low-performing schools. Student achievement results from SY 2011-2012 and SY 2012-2013 indicated that the State's lowest-achieving schools made progress in improving student achievement and graduation rates. The State also took steps to increase the availability of effective teachers and leaders to serve in low-achieving schools and districts through initiatives such as Teach For America, the North Carolina Teacher Corps, and Regional Leadership Academies (RLAs) (see “Ensuring equitable access to effective teachers and leaders” below for more information on these programs).

Throughout the grant period, the State made an effort to communicate with and engage stakeholders including by soliciting their input on its plans. In Year 2, the State launched its READY communications initiative, intended to develop a cohesive understanding of North Carolina's Race to the Top reform agenda among educators and other stakeholders. Through face-to-face outreach meetings and virtual READY sessions, North Carolina delivered information to approximately 26,000 participants in SY 2012-2013. It also supported local implementation and redelivery of this information by disseminating a variety of outreach materials, including podcasts, videos, and frequently asked questions on the CCSS and North Carolina Essential Standards, new assessments, the NCEES, and Home Base.

North Carolina also encountered challenges and worked to overcome them in the first three years of the grant period. In Year 1, DPI had difficulty hiring staff and expanding capacity quickly so that it could shift from planning to implementation of project activities.

<sup>9</sup> Race to the Top States' plans include supporting their LEAs in turning around the lowest-achieving schools by implementing one of the four school intervention models:

**Turnaround model:** Replace the principal and rehire no more than 50 percent of the staff and grant the principal sufficient operational flexibility (including in staffing, calendars/time and budgeting) to fully implement a comprehensive approach to substantially improve student outcomes.

**Restart model:** Convert a school or close and reopen it under a charter school operator, a charter management organization, or an education management organization that has been selected through a rigorous review process.

**School closure:** Close a school and enroll the students who attended that school in other schools in the district that are higher achieving.

**Transformation model:** Implement each of the following strategies: (1) replace the principal and take steps to increase teacher and school leader effectiveness, (2) institute comprehensive instructional reforms, (3) increase learning time and create community-oriented schools, and (4) provide operational flexibility and sustained support.

Delays impacted several of the State's initiatives in the first two years of the Race to the Top grant period. In particular, procurement challenges led to delays in North Carolina's technology initiatives and the implementation of the professional development, coaching, and curriculum development activities in the STEM Anchor School and Affinity Network project (see *Emphasis on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics* for more information). Delays related to procurement continued to affect the State's major technology initiatives in Year 3. Although the State anticipates that both the Cloud and Home Base will be fully implemented during a no-cost extension period of its Race to the Top grant in SY 2014-2015, or Year 5, and continue beyond the grant period with support from other funding sources, the State rolled out some services and functionality later than intended, as described below, leaving less time for educators and LEAs to experience them during the grant period.

Early in the grant period, North Carolina recognized the complexity of providing support to its numerous and diverse LEAs to ensure that teachers and leaders are sufficiently supported to implement reforms at the local level. The State recognized that ongoing, consistent communication and performance management structures would be increasingly important as initiatives proceeded. In Year 3, the State provided varied and extensive resources and training to support LEAs and educators in implementation of the CCSS and NCEES. It took into account feedback from the field to inform these supports and made adjustments as needed. DPI recognized that it would be important to continue to assess local capacity and provide ongoing and differentiated support to promote high-quality implementation of these initiatives in the future.

## State Year 4 summary

### Accomplishments

In Year 4 of Race to the Top, North Carolina focused on launching components of its major technology initiatives, continuously improving implementation across projects, and building local capacity to continue reform initiatives in the future.

North Carolina made significant progress in developing and rolling out Home Base in Year 4. Beginning in fall 2013, the State made available Home Base components and functionality on a rolling basis; all districts began to utilize required Home Base components at the beginning of SY 2013-2014 and some districts participated in pilots and began to use other system components as suited their local needs and priorities throughout the school year. DPI provided extensive training and technical assistance on Home Base in Year 4. Additionally, North Carolina launched its Identity and Access Management (IAM) service at the end of SY 2013-2014, which will provide LEA users with a single point of access to both State and local technology systems.

LEAs continued to use new college- and career-ready standards and the NCEES in Year 4. SY 2013-2014 was the second year of full implementation of the CCSS and North Carolina Essential Standards



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and administration of new statewide assessments, which the State updated to align with the new standards. To support the transition to new standards through educator-created resources and professional development, the State launched the Governor’s Teacher Network in Year 4 with over 400 teachers (see “Providing effective support to teachers and principals” for more information about the Governor’s Teacher Network). Although full implementation of the NCEES is not slated to occur until SY 2014-2015, North Carolina made additional progress toward fully implementing the NCEES in Year 4, collecting the second of three years of student growth data needed to provide teachers and principals with educator effectiveness statuses. For the first time, the State made publicly available aggregated teacher and principal evaluation data on both observation-based standards and student growth ratings. To support educators and LEAs in effectively carrying out these key reform initiatives, DPI continued to provide training, conduct communications and awareness-building sessions, and develop and disseminate supporting materials and resources.

North Carolina continued its efforts to improve outcomes in its lowest-achieving schools, with over 70 DPI coaches deployed to support 104 schools and 12 districts in SY 2013-2014.<sup>10</sup> Many schools to which the State has provided targeted support through Race to the Top have shown improvements in State assessment results, graduation rates, and other measures. Additional cohorts of North Carolina Teacher Corps, Teach For America, and RLA participants assumed instructional and leadership positions in schools across the State.

Engagement and communication remained a focus in Year 4, as North Carolina recognized that the understanding and support of stakeholders will be key to the ongoing implementation of the reforms supported through its Race to the Top plan. READY outreach meetings continued to reach educators from all of the State’s districts and many charter schools and DPI released videos to highlight the positive effects of Race to the Top at the local level (*e.g.*, examples of educators using Home Base in their classrooms). Project managers continued to use Race to the Top Evaluation Team analyses to assess and refine implementation and DPI used this information to answer questions about the impact of initiatives and to inform sustainability planning.

## Challenges

In Year 4, implementation of major technology initiatives posed significant challenges for North Carolina and limited LEAs’ and educators’ opportunities to fully experience the intended benefits of these projects. While the State made substantial progress in rolling out Home Base and reported improvements throughout SY 2013-2014, implementation was challenging. Technical and performance issues (*e.g.*, long page loads) with Home Base components required a great deal of time and resources from both LEAs and DPI to resolve and impacted users’ initial experiences with the system. Delays in

<sup>10</sup> Initially, 118 lowest-achieving schools were identified to receive support through this component of North Carolina’s Race to the Top plan. Over the course of the grant period, 14 schools selected the school closure model, leaving 104 schools to implement intervention models in school year (SY) 2013-2014.

establishing the Cloud infrastructure continued in SY 2013-2014, leaving limited time for the State to expand the services and systems available and to support LEA use. As a result of the slower-than-anticipated roll-out, LEAs have not yet had an opportunity to fully experience Cloud-based services to inform decision-making about future use at the local level. Given that these projects are integral to the State’s overall theory of action and can help to support and sustain many of its other reform initiatives, it is important that the State utilize Year 5 to implement these projects with a high level of quality and continue to deploy support for local implementation.

At the end of the four-year grant period, North Carolina’s equitable access efforts – those projects designed to ensure that students in low-income and low-achieving districts and schools have access to effective teachers and leaders – had mixed results. While the programs created to develop teacher and leader pipelines and to support new teachers experienced significant increases in participation in Year 4, initial results suggest that these initiatives have not reached the State’s lowest-achieving schools and districts to the extent the State initially envisioned. Further, LEAs used strategic staffing plans and recruitment incentives to a more limited extent than intended. After the Race to the Top grant period, once additional data on staffing shortages and project implementation are available, it will be important for the State to assess staffing needs and equitable access issues in order to further understand the impact of these initiatives.

North Carolina has provided varied and extensive resources and training support to LEAs and educators related to implementation of more rigorous standards and its NCEES. It has used stakeholder feedback, requests from the field, and information about implementation to refine and support ongoing implementation. Still, to make ongoing progress and sustain key reform initiatives going forward, it will be essential for the State to continue using routines to gather input, make enhancements to implementation, and provide differentiated supports for LEAs.

## Looking ahead

Many of the reform initiatives and projects North Carolina launched through its Race to the Top plan will continue after the end of the four-year grant period. While Race to the Top funding will no longer directly support the implementation of all initiatives, both the progress made and the resources developed during the grant period will support ongoing implementation. For example, LEAs and schools across the State will fully implement the NCEES in SY 2014-2015 and continue to utilize the evaluation standards, routines, and supporting tools and resources. Educators will also continue to implement North Carolina’s college- and career-ready standards in SY 2014-2015. Additionally, the State will continue work in selected initiatives during a no-cost extension period of its Race to the Top grant in SY 2014-2015, as described below. While North Carolina made significant progress in Years 1 through 4, this additional time will allow the State to fully realize certain projects, further refine implementation in some initiative areas, and build LEA capacity for continuing initiatives with less support from DPI.

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Working toward full roll-out and supporting LEA implementation of the State's major technology initiatives – the Cloud and Home Base – will be major components of the State's Year 5 work. In addition to continuing to implement and support LEA use of Cloud-based services, North Carolina plans to expand the number of Cloud-based services available for local use (*e.g.*, device management). North Carolina plans to roll out the final Home Base component – the summative assessment system – in fall 2014. It also intends to promote LEA and educator use of Home Base through additional support and training as well as enhancement of the online tools and resources available.

Another focus in SY 2014-2015 will be providing ongoing professional development to ensure that educators in the State have the training and information needed to continue carrying out major reform initiatives. The State will maintain personnel needed to implement the Professional Development Initiative framework, and Distinguished Leadership in Practice (DLP) Institutes will continue to provide leadership development for superintendents, principals, and assistant principals. Additionally, members of the Governor's Teacher Network plan to create professional development and instructional

resources intended to build local capacity to sustain reform efforts related to college- and career-ready standards.

The State's efforts to promote equitable access to effective teachers and leaders and to improve lowest-achieving schools will continue in Year 5. In an effort to support LEAs to address issues related to ensuring that students in low-performing schools and districts have access to effective educators, DPI intends to provide subgrants to its 12 lowest-achieving districts to develop and implement plans to address equitable staffing issues. Teachers and principals in 76 lowest-achieving schools will also continue to receive support from DPI coaches in Year 5.

DPI personnel will continue to provide oversight and project management for the projects that have no-cost extensions in Year 5. The Race to the Top Evaluation Team will conclude its work, using SY 2013-2014 data (*e.g.*, student outcomes, project results, LEA expenditures) to inform summative reports and findings on Race to the Top. In addition to the State-led projects that will continue in Year 5, North Carolina approved 68 LEAs to continue local activities using approximately \$11,000,000 in Race to the Top funds until June 30, 2015.

## State Success Factors

Race to the Top States are developing a comprehensive and coherent approach to education reform. This involves creating plans to build strong statewide capacity to implement, scale up, and sustain the reforms initiated by the Race to the Top grant program.

### Building capacity to support LEAs

To support implementation of its Race to the Top efforts, DPI developed internal structures and processes designed to keep projects on track and to encourage collaboration across initiatives. At the beginning of the grant period, DPI created the Race to the Top Project Management Office (PMO) to manage Race to the Top implementation. In Year 4, the PMO continued to oversee and monitor the State's progress in implementing its 15 State-led Race to the Top initiatives. Instead of working in silos, DPI project coordinators responsible for each initiative are embedded within standing agency divisions (*e.g.*, Educator Effectiveness and District and School Transformation) and collaborate across divisions. The PMO regularly convenes DPI senior leadership, division directors, and project coordinators to discuss progress, identify and address issues and needs, and foster collaboration. In Year 4, the PMO continued its oversight and support for LEA implementation of Race to the Top and expanded its stakeholder communications and engagement efforts (see "Stakeholder engagement" for more information).

The NC Education Cloud is both a technology initiative and a part of North Carolina's efforts to strengthen local ability to implement

reform initiatives. Through the Cloud, the State aims to improve service reliability, increase efficiency, and decrease long-term information technology costs for all LEAs by securing agreements for services and products (*e.g.*, email) that LEAs historically have acquired independently. Once fully implemented, the Cloud will provide or facilitate a wide array of district- and school-level shared technology infrastructure functions.

In Year 4, the State continued to support LEA pilots of and migrations to Cloud-based services and identified additional systems and services for future procurement and development based on LEA needs. During SY 2013-2014, 30 LEAs used a Cloud-based shared environment for financial, human resources, and licensure applications. Additionally, over 100 LEAs had migrated to Cloud-based email, firewall, and filtering services. North Carolina estimates significant cost savings – approximately \$6.6 million annually across LEAs – based on the use of these shared services.

North Carolina also made progress in implementing its IAM service, which will allow users to access local and State systems through a single sign-on portal. In summer 2014, the State rolled out IAM with five systems initially integrated, facilitating user access to these separate systems through a single logon.

# State Success Factors

## Support and accountability for LEAs

In order to assess and support local implementation of Race to the Top grant activities, North Carolina established routines for monitoring and providing assistance to LEAs. DPI continued to monitor Race to the Top implementation at the LEA level in Year 4. As in past years, participating LEAs developed and submitted Progress Reports, designed to assess and document their progress over the course of the year against commitments outlined in their local Scopes of Work. Based on review by DPI and field-based regional staff, the State differentiated follow-up with LEAs, including face-to-face visits to over 70 LEAs in SY 2013-2014. In some cases, the State worked with LEAs to refine their Progress Reports or amend their Scopes of Work as necessary.

North Carolina also supported LEA implementation through initiative-specific activities. For example, the State helped LEAs to mitigate technical issues and provided guidance on using different Home Base components through webinars, visits from vendor and DPI staff, and the Home Base Support Center. As part of the Professional Development Initiative, field-based professional

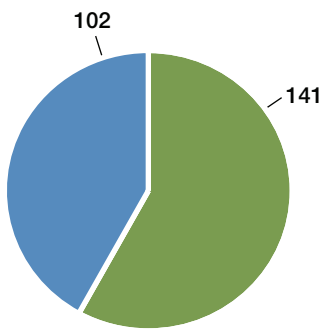
development staff continued to work closely with LEAs based on their specific needs and priorities and delivered customized training sessions as needed. The State also continued to be responsive to local requests for training and support around the NCEES.

## LEA participation

LEA participation in North Carolina's Race to the Top initiative has been extensive throughout the grant period. Based on the definition of "participating LEA" in the Race to the Top Notice Inviting Applications, in addition to North Carolina's 115 districts, 51 charter schools that receive Title I, Part A funding were eligible to receive funds from the LEA portion of the grant.<sup>11</sup> As depicted in the graphs below, as of June 30, 2014, North Carolina reported 141 participating LEAs, including all 115 districts and 26 charter schools. This represents 96.8 percent of the State's kindergarten through 12th-grade (K-12) students and nearly 99 percent of its students in poverty.

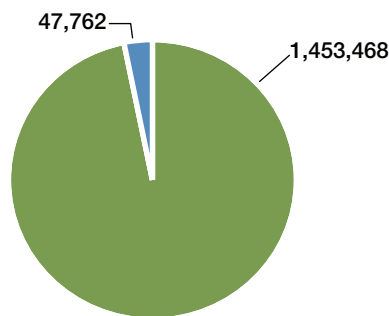
<sup>11</sup> At the time of Race to the Top application, there were 99 charter schools in North Carolina, but only 51 were eligible to receive funds from the LEA portion of the State's Race to the Top grant.

LEAs participating in North Carolina's Race to the Top plan



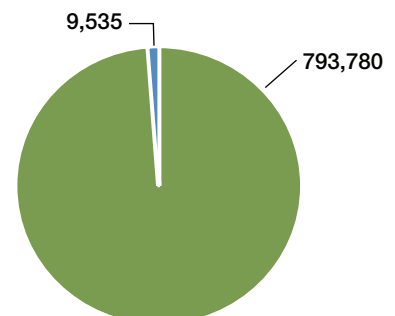
■ Participating LEAs (#)  
■ Other LEAs (#)

K-12 students in LEAs participating in North Carolina's Race to the Top plan



■ K-12 students (#) in participating LEAs  
■ K-12 students (#) in other LEAs

Students in poverty in LEAs participating in North Carolina's Race to the Top plan



■ Students in poverty (#) in participating LEAs  
■ Students in poverty (#) in other LEAs

The number of K-12 students and number of students in poverty statewide are calculated using pre-release data from the National Center for Education Statistics' (NCES) Common Core of Data (CCD). Students in poverty statewide comes from the CCD measure of the number of students eligible for free or reduced price lunch subsidy (commonly used as a proxy for the number of students who are economically disadvantaged in a school) under the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National School Lunch Program. The students in poverty statewide and number of K-12 students statewide counts are aggregations of school-level counts summed to State-level counts. Statistical procedures were applied systematically by CCD to these data to prevent potential disclosure of information about individual students as well as for data quality assurance; consequently State-level counts may differ from those originally reported by the State. Please note that these data are considered to be preliminary as of August 29, 2014.

For State-reported context, please refer to the Race to the Top APR at [www.rtt-apr.us](http://www.rtt-apr.us).

# State Success Factors

## Stakeholder engagement

In Year 4, North Carolina continued its efforts to inform and solicit input from stakeholders through a variety of mechanisms. DPI's READY communications initiative aims to provide educators with a cohesive understanding of North Carolina's Race to the Top reform agenda. The State created and disseminated informational materials on the State's reform initiatives designed specifically for parents and hosted a television program broadcast in fall 2013. Additionally, the State held face-to-face regional READY sessions in spring 2014. The most recent sessions focused on updates about Home Base roll-out and opt-in decisions (see "Accessing and using State data" for more information), educator effectiveness, and North Carolina's new statewide accountability model.<sup>12</sup> Superintendents and key central office personnel from all 115 districts and many charter schools participated. Other regular communications efforts included weekly emails and newsletters, quarterly superintendent meetings, and a State Race to the Top website that features a variety of resources.

### Using Videos to Highlight Accomplishments and Engage Stakeholders

In Year 4, North Carolina used additional mechanisms to reach a variety of stakeholder groups with information about its progress in implementing reforms statewide. To highlight how the State's READY initiative and Race to the Top implementation are being carried out in local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (DPI) developed and released a series of videos. The videos highlight how reform initiatives have positively impacted teaching and learning, supported improvement in the State's lowest-achieving schools and districts, and encouraged the use of data to drive instruction. For example, one video demonstrates how Race to the Top has supported science, technology, engineering, and mathematics instruction in one school district, while another shows how the support that coaches provide in a lowest-achieving district has been instrumental to its improvement. Additionally, the videos demonstrate how Home Base is being used by educators across the State. Twenty-three videos are available on DPI's YouTube Channel. See <https://www.youtube.com/user/ncpublicschools> to view the video series.

Stakeholders played a key role in the development of many of the State's Race to the Top initiatives at the beginning of the grant period and North Carolina has deliberately sought ongoing feedback from a variety of stakeholder groups as implementation has proceeded over the past four years. The Home Base External Stakeholder Advisory Group – which consists of representatives from LEAs and charter schools, education association representatives, and other stakeholders – has provided ongoing input on the State's roll-out strategy. Throughout Year 4, DPI personnel were in regular contact with LEAs across the State that were beginning to use components of Home Base in order to gather feedback on system performance and functionality and make adjustments as needed. Additionally, the State conducted a survey of educators regarding standards implementation in order not only to assess implementation to date but also to gather input on the training and resources that the State has developed (see *Standards and Assessments* for more information).

## Continuous improvement

In order to assess and learn from implementation of its Race to the Top-funded projects, North Carolina established and utilized feedback loops. DPI contracted with a consortium of North Carolina universities at the beginning of the grant period to conduct an evaluation of its Race to the Top reform efforts overall as well as of specific initiatives in key program areas such as professional development and turning around the lowest-achieving schools. Over the past four years, the Race to the Top Evaluation Team has gathered information through both initiative-specific and statewide surveys, focus groups, observations, and site visits to inform annual, formative finding, and final summative reports assessing progress and quality of implementation. As the grant period nears its end, the Evaluation Team has devoted additional resources to summative evaluation activities and the development of final reports. As of fall 2014, the Evaluation Team had completed and publicly released a total of 42 reports detailing progress across projects in each of the evaluation strands: Teacher and Leader Evaluation, Supply and Distribution of Teachers and Leaders, Professional Development, District and School Transformation, Local Spending, and Overall Evaluation.<sup>13</sup> North Carolina anticipates that it will complete and release additional summative evaluation reports during Year 5.

In Year 4, North Carolina continued to use the Evaluation Team's analyses to understand progress and quality of implementation of Race to the Top projects and to inform mid-course adjustments. For example, the State adjusted its approach to promoting equitable access to effective teachers and leaders based on information regarding the causes of low participation in the State's recruitment incentive opportunity (please see "Ensuring equitable access to effective teachers and principals" for more information). The Evaluation Team's analyses

<sup>12</sup> Effective with SY 2012-2013, the State Board of Education (SBE) adopted the READY Accountability Model, which replaced the ABCs of Public Education. The model takes into account schools' performance on growth, performance, and progress measures and intends to help educators, parents, and other stakeholders understand the status and progress that schools are making toward ensuring that all students are college- and career-ready.

<sup>13</sup> See <http://cerenc.org/rttt-evaluation/executive-%20summaries/> for additional information.



## State Success Factors

of the effects of interventions in the State's lowest-achieving schools and districts informed DPI's and field-based coaches' strategies for supporting these schools and districts. Additionally, the State reports that the evaluation studies have increased transparency about the Race to the Top work and its outcomes, informing conversations with and allowing DPI to provide information to stakeholder groups such as LEAs, the State Board of Education (SBE), and the State legislature. In some cases, the State reported that evaluation findings were not available in time to be of use in immediate decision-making, but still provided valuable information to inform future decision-making and practice.

### Successes and challenges

Over the course of the grant period, North Carolina has established and implemented management, oversight, and evaluation practices that have helped it to make mid-course corrections and develop a strong understanding of progress and quality of implementation across initiatives. The State has made adjustments to many projects based on feedback received from the Evaluation Team, and it appears that these feedback loops have become an integral and regular part of the State's implementation processes.

In Year 4, the State further expanded its communication and engagement activities in an effort to not only build stakeholder understanding of the reform initiatives currently underway, but also to foster support for future implementation. Through READY sessions, videos, and materials, North Carolina continued to reach educators, parents, and other interested stakeholders. Still, the extent to which this information is being disseminated and affecting behavior at the local level may vary across LEAs.

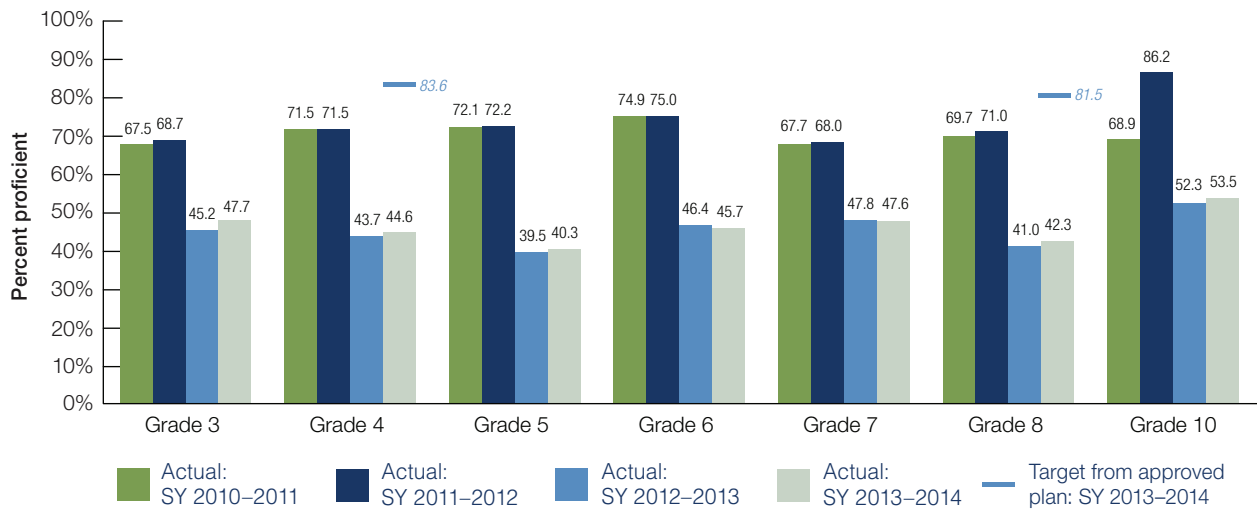
North Carolina continued to be challenged in Year 4 to deliver against its commitment to develop and make available its Cloud information technology infrastructure. While some progress was made during SY 2013-2014, and the Cloud appears to represent a significant cost-savings opportunity for LEAs, there are still risks to the successful completion of this work in Year 5. Prior delays in procurement and internal processes have slowed development and roll-out of Cloud-based systems and services, leaving a limited period of time within the grant for LEAs to use them. Given the importance of the Cloud to the State's plan for supporting LEA capacity and efficiency through technology, high-quality, on-time implementation will be a focus of the State's Year 5 work in this project.

# State Success Factors

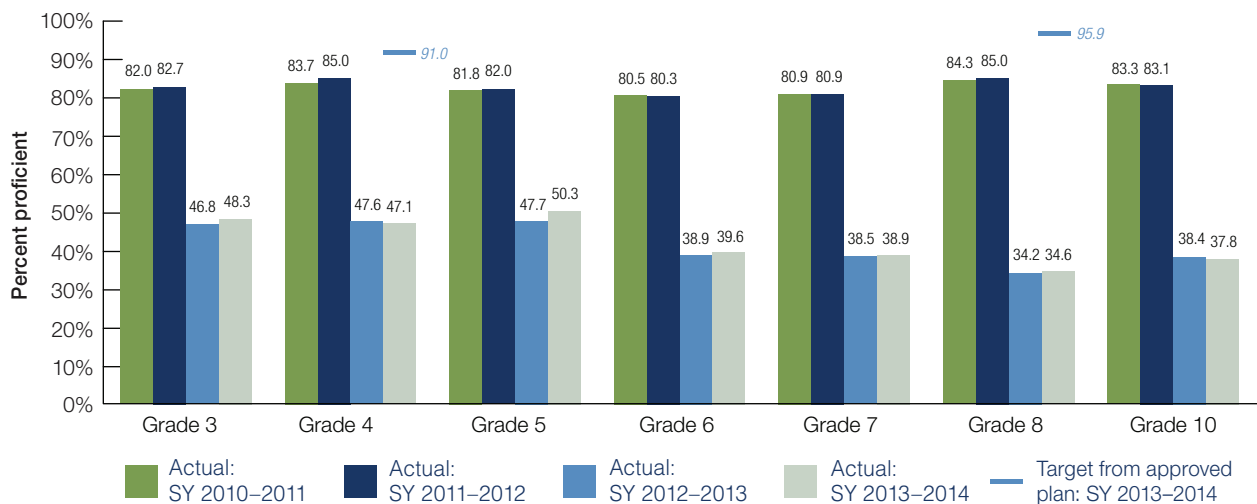
## Student outcomes data

As a part of its ongoing commitment to increase the rigor of its standards and assessments, North Carolina administered its new State assessments for the second time in spring 2014. While North Carolina's State English language arts (ELA) and mathematics assessment results remained approximately the same from SY 2012-2013 to SY 2013-2014, there were minor increases in the percentage of students proficient in grade 3 ELA and grade 5 mathematics.

### Student proficiency on North Carolina's ELA assessment



### Student proficiency on North Carolina's mathematics assessment



Preliminary SY 2013-2014 data reported as of: November 10, 2014.

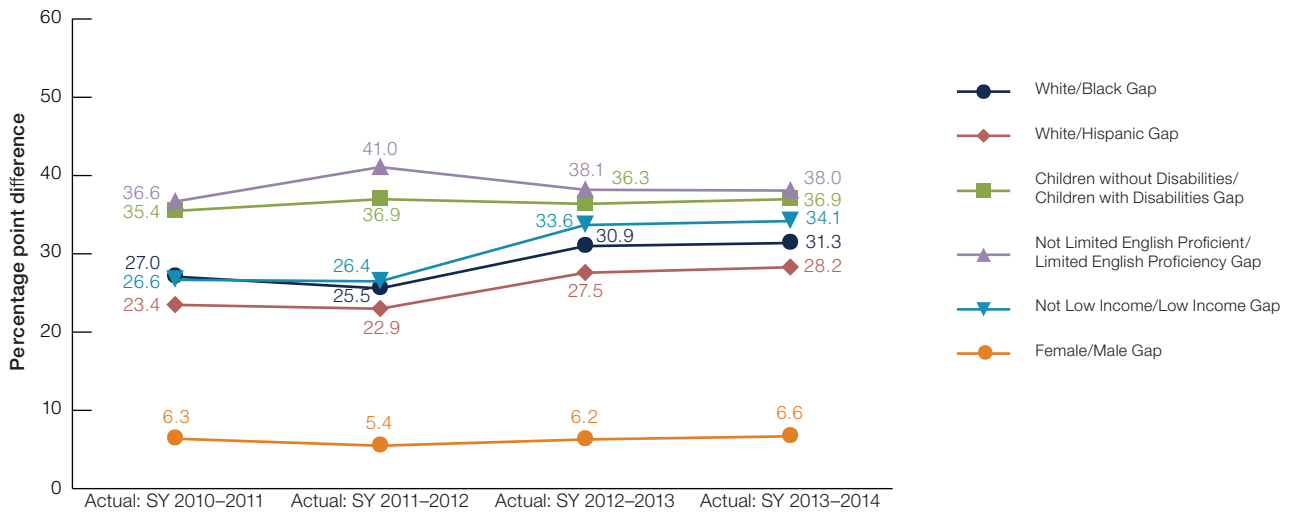
NOTE: Over the last four years, a number of States adopted new assessments and/or cut scores.

For State-reported context, please refer to the Race to the Top APR at [www.rtt-apr.us](http://www.rtt-apr.us).

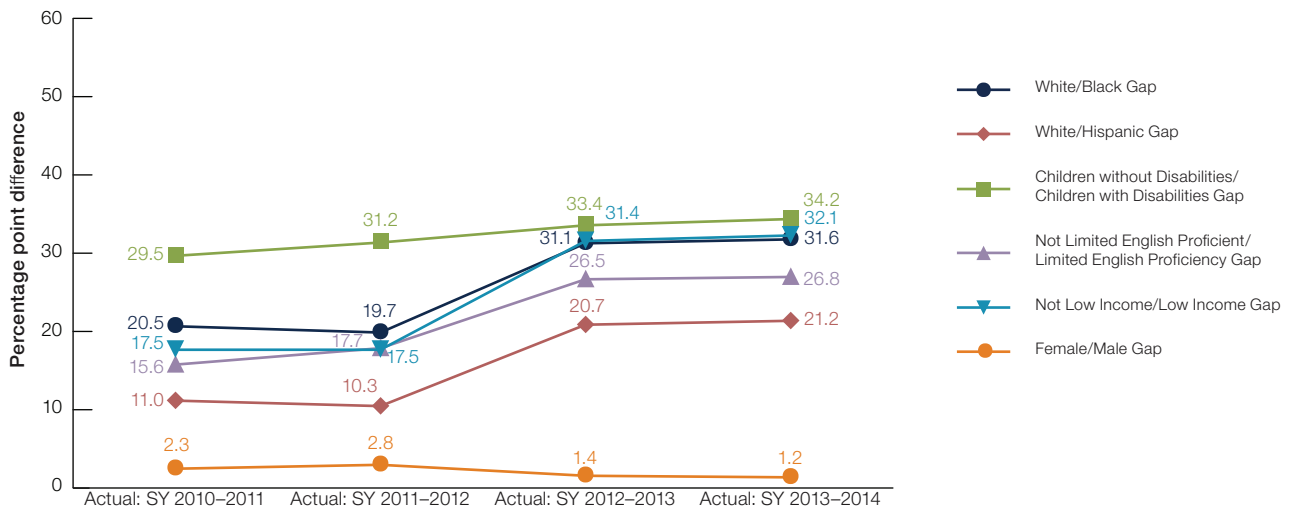
# State Success Factors

Most achievement gaps on North Carolina's State ELA and mathematics assessments increased slightly between SY 2012-2013 and SY 2013-2014.

### Achievement gap on North Carolina's ELA assessment



### Achievement gap on North Carolina's mathematics assessment



Preliminary SY 2013-2014 data reported as of: November 10, 2014.

Numbers in the graph represent the gap over four school years between two sub-groups on the State's ELA and mathematics assessments.

Achievement gaps were calculated by subtracting the percent of students scoring proficient in the lower-performing sub-group from the percent of students scoring proficient in the higher-performing sub-group to get the percentage point difference between the proficiency of the two sub-groups.

If the achievement gap narrowed between two sub-groups, the line will slope downward. If the achievement gap increased between two sub-groups, the line will slope upward.

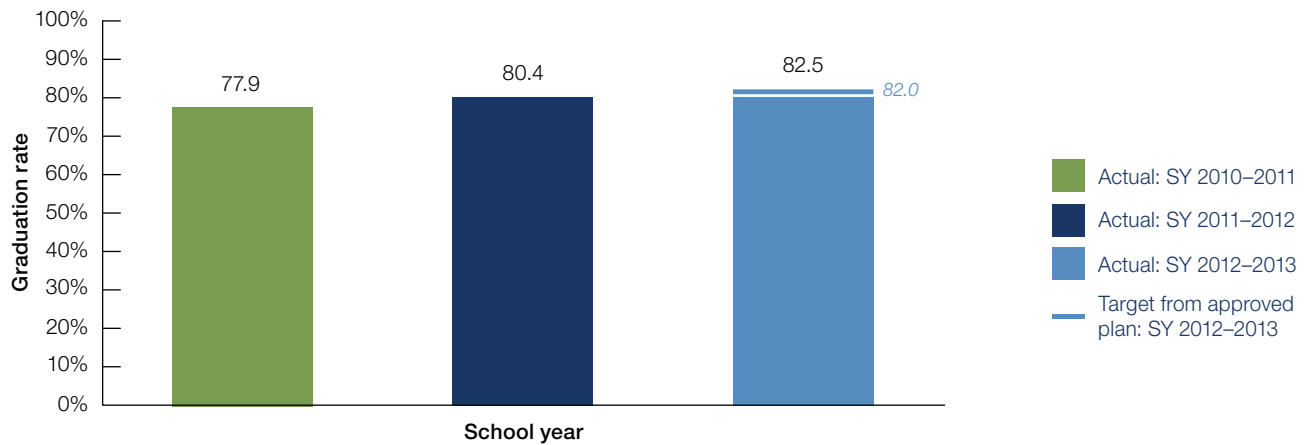
NOTE: Over the last four years, a number of States adopted new assessments and/or cut scores.

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# State Success Factors

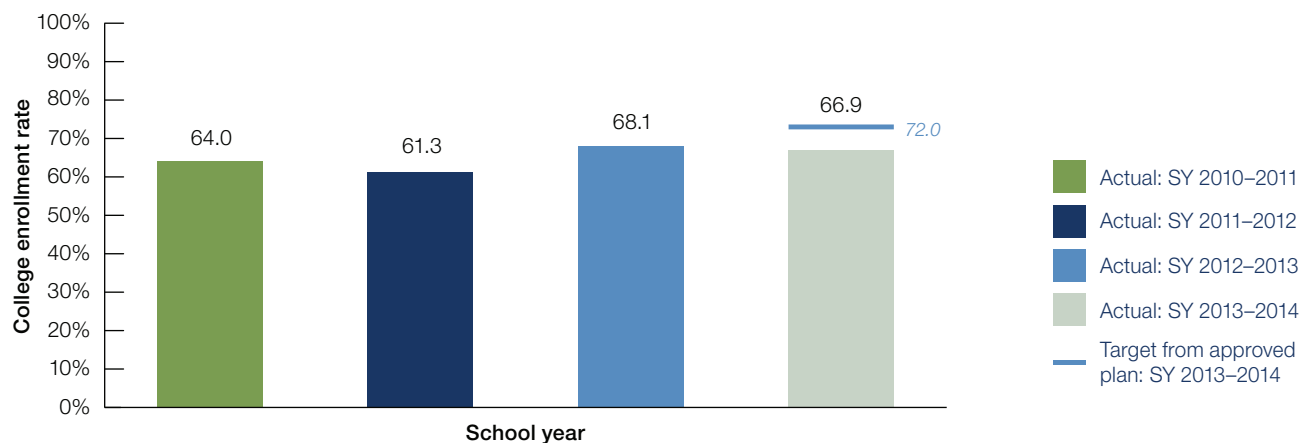
North Carolina's statewide high school graduation rate increased again from SY 2011-2012 to SY 2012-2013, representing an increase of approximately four percentage points since SY 2010-2011. Additionally, the State's graduation rate exceeded its SY 2012-2013 Race to the Top target. Although North Carolina's SY 2013-2014 college enrollment rate decreased slightly from SY 2012-2013, it shows a minor increase from the State's SY 2010-2011 rate.

## High school graduation rate



Preliminary SY 2012-2013 data reported as of: September 15, 2014.  
For State-reported context, please refer to the Race to the Top APR at [www.rtt-apr.us](http://www.rtt-apr.us).

## College enrollment rate



Preliminary SY 2013-2014 data reported as of: October 9, 2014.  
For State-reported context, please refer to the Race to the Top APR at [www.rtt-apr.us](http://www.rtt-apr.us).

The Department provided guidance to States regarding the reporting period for college enrollment. For SY 2013-2014 data, States report on the students who graduated from high school in SY 2011-2012 and enrolled in an institution of higher education (IHE).



# Standards and Assessments

Implementing rigorous college- and career-ready standards and assessments that prepare students for success in college and career is an integral aspect of education reform in all Race to the Top States.

## Supporting the transition to college- and career-ready standards and high-quality assessments

DPI has been preparing North Carolina educators for the transition to new standards through a variety of means since the beginning of the grant period. SY 2013-2014 was the second year of full implementation of the State's college- and career-ready standards, including the CCSS for ELA and mathematics and the North Carolina Essential Standards for subjects not included in the CCSS.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, North Carolina administered new State assessments for the second time in spring 2014.

In Year 4, DPI continued to devote significant attention to LEA outreach and support to build local understanding and capacity to implement the CCSS and North Carolina Essential Standards. The State's READY face-to-face regional and virtual sessions have addressed the transition to new standards through frequently asked questions, podcasts, and videos, and DPI has provided accompanying outreach materials for session participants to use in local redelivery of information. As in its Year 3 training and outreach, the State emphasized instructional content shifts and the impact of implementing new standards on classroom instruction in SY 2013-2014.

North Carolina enhanced its efforts to understand standards implementation at the local level to inform future supports. In addition to conducting bi-annual regional "fidelity support" sessions (see "Providing effective support to teachers and principals" for more information), the State administered a statewide survey to gather information about teachers' perceptions of the CCSS and North Carolina Essential Standards, implementation of the new standards, and feedback on ways to improve available resources and professional development. Through this survey, the State learned that 92 percent of respondents felt prepared to teach the new standards and that educators wanted additional district training and more time to collaborate with colleagues on planning and aligning instruction with the standards. Additionally, survey results indicated that the majority of educators had utilized resources from DPI wikispaces and participated in webinars related to implementing the CCSS in ELA and mathematics and found those supports to be helpful.

While North Carolina remained a member of the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (Smarter Balanced) in Year 4 and DPI staff continued to participate in its working groups, the State determined that it does not intend to implement the Smarter Balanced assessments

in SY 2014-2015 as initially planned. In February 2014, the SBE determined that North Carolina would continue to use its current assessments through SY 2015-2016 and decided to convene an advisory group composed of superintendents, principals, and teachers to make a recommendation about which assessments to administer in SY 2016-2017. As a result of these decisions, LEAs were not required to participate in the spring 2014 Smarter Balanced field testing activities.

## Dissemination of resources and professional development

North Carolina has made available a variety of resources and training opportunities to support the transition to the CCSS and North Carolina Essential Standards and continually updates and adjusts supports based on requests from and needs identified in the field. Following SY 2013-2014, the State held its fourth round of Summer Institutes, providing intensive professional development to approximately 2,200 participants (*e.g.*, teacher leaders, principals, central office administrators) from LEA teams from all eight regions of the State. The Year 4 Summer Institutes focused on sustainability and sharing best practices across the State. LEA leadership teams created and delivered the majority of the content for the Institutes, presenting examples of innovative implementation related to new standards and assessments, educator evaluation, and Home Base. For example, a middle school principal conducted a session on how to use Educator Value-Added Assessment System (EVAAS) data to make instructional decisions. Participants learned about the reports available to them in EVAAS and how to use those reports to make instructional decisions as administrators and classroom teachers.

North Carolina also developed and made additional online professional development modules available. By the end of SY 2013-2014, the State completed and made accessible to educators 36 modules and also created facilitated versions of two modules to allow educators to engage with the content in an instructor-led setting rather than individually.

In addition to providing tools and resources to support standards implementation through collaborative workspaces or "wikispaces," North Carolina has included instructional resources (*e.g.*, curriculum maps, lesson plans) in Home Base. As of fall 2014, nearly 38,000 resources were available for ELA, mathematics, health education, science, social studies, and World Languages, and North Carolina reported that it is working to include resources for additional grades and content areas. In addition to State-vetted resources, LEAs and schools added over 7,600 locally-developed resources to Home Base.

<sup>14</sup> The North Carolina General Assembly passed and the Governor signed legislation in July 2014 that calls for the creation of an advisory commission to review the State's English language arts (ELA) and mathematics standards and make recommendations for revisions to the SBE. Current standards will remain in place at least through SY 2014-2015

# Standards and Assessments

## Successes and challenges

In Year 4, North Carolina continued to support LEAs and educators in adapting to new standards through a variety of face-to-face and virtual trainings, offering multiple methods for LEAs and educators to receive guidance and direction as well as share best practices and lessons learned. Going forward, it will be important for the State to continue to be strategic about what materials and supports it develops and provides, given resource constraints. Home Base presents a significant opportunity for North Carolina to support standards implementation through delivery and cross-district sharing of resources and use of formative assessments to inform instruction. It

will be important for the State to continue to ensure that high-quality resources that meet educators' needs across all grades and subjects are made available through this platform.

North Carolina has made commendable efforts to assess and promote fidelity of implementation of its new standards. However, given that implementation is still in its early stages, it is difficult at this point to assess the extent to which these efforts have built local capacity or impacted daily classroom instruction. Additional time and evidence are needed to assess fully whether the State-provided training, tools, and instructional support resources have fostered high-quality implementation.

## Data Systems to Support Instruction

Statewide longitudinal data systems (SLDS) and instructional improvement systems (IIS) enhance the ability of States to effectively manage, use, and analyze education data to support instruction. Race to the Top States are working to ensure that their data systems are accessible to key stakeholders and that the data support educators and decision-makers in their efforts to improve instruction and increase student achievement.

### Fully implementing a statewide longitudinal data system

North Carolina made progress toward the objective of making data accessible to stakeholders by establishing an SLDS and taking steps to improve the quality of the data captured in that system. North Carolina's pre-kindergarten through high school statewide longitudinal data system, the Common Education Data Analysis and Reporting System (CEDARS), launched in October 2011 and achieved full functionality for reporting purposes in March 2012.<sup>15</sup> The system contains data from more than 30 sources and uses a unique identifier system to link students and staff, matching data across various sources such as financial systems, teacher licensure programs, student information, and testing data. In addition to being used to meet federal reporting requirements, CEDARS offers tools that allow for analyses of trends and relationships over time. As of SY 2013-2014, four full years of data (SYs 2010-2011, 2011-2012, 2012-2013, and 2013-2014) were available in CEDARS. According to the State, this system is compliant with the privacy regulations of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act.

North Carolina reported that CEDARS has reduced burden on LEA staff by streamlining the process for preparing data files to meet reporting requirements and through data validation tools that allow for more rapid identification of issues. However, LEA use of CEDARS was limited in SY 2013-2014. While LEA users seemed to access the system more frequently when State assessment results became available, both the number of users and the number of views of CEDARS dashboards and reports were lower than the State expected. The State reported that this is due to improvements in data quality that reduce the frequency with which LEA users must access the system as well as a focus on and diversion of resources to Home Base implementation. However, it may also indicate that LEA users do not currently understand how to use CEDARS to inform decision-making at the local level.

Although the State decided not to hold monthly CEDARS webinars in Year 4, it did continue to introduce LEA staff to CEDARS and to demonstrate its functionality at conferences and other events. Training materials related to using CEDARS are also available on the DPI website. In Year 3, the State made additional reports available in CEDARS related to students with limited English proficiency and discipline data, but in Year 4 it paused development of additional dashboards due to a need to focus resources on Home Base implementation.

<sup>15</sup> The State refers to the Common Education Data Analysis and Reporting System (CEDARS) as "PK-13" because it contains data on all public school students from pre-kindergarten through high school, as well as students participating in early college high school programs whom the system codes as grade 13.

# Data Systems to Support Instruction

## Accessing and using State data

Developing technology and data systems to promote educator effectiveness and improve student outcomes was a major objective in North Carolina's Race to the Top plan. Although the State encountered challenges in creating an integrated Student Information System and IIS, known as "Home Base," it has made progress toward this objective.<sup>16</sup> Following initial roll-out in summer 2013, North Carolina implemented most components of Home Base on a rolling basis throughout SY 2013-2014. Through Home Base, educators, students, and parents can access a wide variety of information and resources through a system composed of multiple integrated components. In Year 4, the State began implementation of its: Student Information System, which provides attendance, gradebook, and student and parent portals; NCEES online tool, used for teacher and principal evaluation; professional development system; instructional management system, which provides curriculum and instruction, classroom and benchmark assessment, and data analysis tools; and course management and online collaboration tool. While development of the summative assessment delivery system was completed in Year 4, testing and quality assurance activities of this component are slated to occur in fall 2014 to allow for its use in SY 2014-2015.<sup>17</sup> The various Home Base components have the ability to help educators manage assessments, student work, school and student data, classroom activities, and their professional growth. Home Base also provides dashboards for students to access their schoolwork and instructional

### Home Base at Work at Liberty Drive Elementary School

Educators at Liberty Drive Elementary School in Thomasville City Schools have embraced all aspects of the instructional management system component of Home Base and are using its tools and resources daily to shape instruction. Teachers use resources available through the system in daily instruction, measure progress using assessment items, and apply data and reporting tools to track student growth and drive efforts to close gaps in student learning. Teachers recognize the value of having access to assessment items that are aligned to the State's new standards and feel confident that the classroom and benchmark assessments they create using these items are accurate measures of their students' learning of the standards. Once benchmark assessments have been completed, teachers analyze student performance to make instructional decisions. Instructional coaches work with teachers to analyze the data, identify gaps in student learning, and develop strategies to help students improve.

<sup>16</sup> Although the State's Student Information System is not funded through Race to the Top, some of the instructional improvement system requirements are met through the Student Information System and the Student Information System is connected to other Home Base components.

<sup>17</sup> North Carolina's Race to the Top plan includes funding to support the procurement, piloting, and rollout of software that will allow for the online administration of the State's End of Grade and End of Course assessments. No funds will be used to develop summative assessments.

activities and for parents to view information about student attendance and progress.

Initial system performance and technical issues impacted LEAs' and educators' experiences with Home Base in SY 2013-2014. For example, the single sign-on solution did not reliably allow users to access all Home Base components. Issues such as long page loads and time-outs surfaced, particularly as usage of the system increased. North Carolina reported that many issues stemmed from the integration of the Student Information System with other Home Base components, given that there is a dependency on the accuracy of data in the Student Information System for all other systems to function as intended. The State carefully monitored issues reported by LEA and school users and collaborated with both vendors and LEAs to implement solutions. Both DPI and LEAs reported that the State and its vendors made improvements to the system throughout the school year. Further, as of summer 2014, all districts in the State and approximately 44 percent of charter schools decided to opt-in to use Home Base in SY 2014-2015.<sup>18</sup>

Throughout SY 2013-2014, the State continued to use several training, communications, and feedback mechanisms to build LEA awareness of and educators' capacity to use Home Base and to gather feedback on initial implementation. In addition to regional train-the-trainer events, the State held webinars to meet needs based on feedback from local superintendents, educators, technology specialists, and other stakeholders. DPI continued to update stakeholders on Home Base development through newsletters and began holding weekly status webinars to provide implementation updates to all LEA staff. The fourth round of READY meetings (see *State Success Factors* for more information), held in spring 2014, focused on Home Base implementation and provided information about LEA opt-in. Further, the State added a Home Base Toolkit to its website, consisting of resources and training materials for use at the local level, and established a Home Base Support Center to respond to requests for technical assistance. North Carolina collaborated with eight LEA early adopters to learn what was required to successfully roll out the Home Base platform and support implementation at the local level. These LEAs received support and technical assistance from DPI and Home Base experts, and the State shared information about lessons learned from the partnerships with LEAs across the State following SY 2013-2014.

North Carolina built on its Year 3 efforts to gather, align, and tag resources for inclusion in Home Base. As of fall 2014, Home Base included nearly 38,000 instructional resources (e.g., lesson plans, curriculum units, content resources) and nearly 80,000 classroom and benchmark assessment items. LEAs also have the ability to include and share their own instructional resources in Home Base.

<sup>18</sup> While LEAs are required to use some components of Home Base (the Student Information System, educator evaluation system online tool, and summative assessment delivery system) and the State provides these systems to LEAs at no cost, LEAs are able to make local decisions about whether to pay to use the other, optional Home Base components. All 115 districts in North Carolina opted-in to use the non-required components of Home Base in SY 2014-2015, as did 56 of 126 charter schools. LEAs will have regular opportunities to determine whether to continue to pay for use of non-required components after SY 2014-2015.

# Data Systems to Support Instruction

In Year 4, North Carolina was featured in multiple RSN publications related to the use of data and technology systems to support instruction. In summer 2014, the State's work was highlighted in a guidebook intended to support IIS implementation planning and management. North Carolina also contributed to a guidance document related to developing and implementing data systems and processes to support instructional improvement.<sup>19</sup>

## Successes and challenges

Although the State has made a significant amount of data available to LEA staff through CEDARS, additional time is needed for the State to promote the use of this information in local decision-making. While the State has made notable progress by establishing a fully functioning SLDS and making a wide variety of data available to stakeholders, it does not appear at this point that the information is being used as the State envisioned – to inform continuous improvement in policy, instruction, operations, and management. Moving forward, it will be important for the State to not only ensure that stakeholders have access to useful, high-quality longitudinal data, but also that they understand how to apply that information to inform practice.

<sup>19</sup> Reform Support Network (RSN) publications can be found at <http://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/implementation-support-unit/tech-assist/index.html>.

After facing previous delays in Home Base procurement, development, and implementation, North Carolina rolled out most Home Base components in Year 4. Given the scale, interdependencies, and complexity of the development and deployment of system elements, this represents a substantial accomplishment. However, initial implementation was challenging, and users did not have an opportunity to fully engage with the system or experience the benefits expected through its full functionality in SY 2013–2014 due to system performance and technical issues. While multiple factors contributed to these challenges and North Carolina made a significant effort to mitigate issues, additional time is needed to determine if this will impact educators' willingness to access and apply its tools and resources in their instructional practice in SY 2014–2015 and beyond. It will be important for the State to ensure that Home Base functionality continues to be rolled out with high quality and on the intended timeframe, that mechanisms remain in place to assess implementation and inform ongoing improvements, and that educators have the training and resources necessary to integrate Home Base tools and resources into their daily practice.

## Great Teachers and Leaders

Race to the Top States are developing comprehensive systems of educator effectiveness by supporting high-quality pathways for aspiring teachers and principals, ensuring equitable access to effective teachers and principals, improving the effectiveness of teacher and principal preparation programs, and providing effective supports to all educators. As part of these efforts, Race to the Top States are designing and implementing rigorous, transparent, and fair evaluation systems for teachers and principals; conducting annual evaluations that include timely and constructive feedback; and using evaluation information to inform professional development, compensation, promotion, retention, and tenure decisions.

### Improving teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance

Over the past several years, North Carolina has been laying the groundwork for, piloting and refining components of, and supporting LEAs and educators in the transition to, the NCEES. Through the NCEES, the State intends to better differentiate between effective and ineffective educators, improve educator effectiveness, and ultimately improve student outcomes. First piloted in SY 2008–2009, NCEES standards require educators to demonstrate leadership, establish a respectful learning environment, possess content knowledge, facilitate learning, and reflect on practice. Through Race to the Top, the State expanded its standards to include data on student growth. In Year 2, the SBE formally adopted student growth standards – the sixth

standard for teachers, and the eighth standard for principals – for inclusion in teachers' and principals' evaluations.<sup>20</sup> The State selected EVAAS as its model to measure student growth and in Year 3 the SBE determined that the sixth standard would be composed entirely of individual value-added data where available.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> North Carolina's teacher evaluation system includes six standards: (1) demonstrate leadership, (2) establish a respectful environment for a diverse population of students, (3) know the content taught, (4) facilitate learning for students, (5) reflect on practice, and (6) contribute to academic success. North Carolina's principal evaluation system includes eight standards: (1) strategic leadership, (2) instructional leadership, (3) cultural leadership, (4) human resource leadership, (5) managerial leadership, (6) external development leadership, (7) micropolitical leadership, and (8) academic achievement leadership.

<sup>21</sup> In SY 2011–2012, the State utilized interim weights for the sixth standard rating, basing it 70 percent on individual value-added growth and 30 percent on schoolwide growth. In SY 2012–2013, applying the final weights approved by the SBE, North Carolina based sixth standard ratings entirely on individual value-added data, where available.



# Great Teachers and Leaders

For both SY 2011-2012 and SY 2012-2013, principals and teachers received ratings on both the observation-based and student growth standards that are used to inform professional development and human capital decisions. North Carolina publicly released SY 2011-2012 State-, LEA-, and school-level aggregated data on standards one through five in spring 2013. Based on SY 2012-2013 NCEES results, North Carolina made publicly available State-, LEA- and school-level aggregated data for standards one through six in fall 2013. Following SY 2014-2015, once educators have three years of student growth data, they will receive their first overall effectiveness statuses.<sup>22</sup>

As a part of its larger Professional Development Initiative, and in response to educators' needs and implementation issues identified in the field, DPI continued to make available a variety of professional development and training resources to support educator evaluation. The State made available ten online learning modules to inform educators about how EVAAS is calculated and how this information can be used for instructional planning and offered both virtual and in-person trainings on EVAAS. Professional Development Leads conducted day-long sessions on fine-tuning implementation of the evaluation rubric and processes and educators can also access READY materials and recorded webinars on educator effectiveness for more information. The State anticipates making an online observation calibration tool available in Year 5 to support inter-rater reliability among evaluators.

In Year 4, North Carolina participated in an RSN convening intended to support States in identifying trends and challenges related to evaluation rating accuracy as well as the overall effectiveness of evaluation systems in improving teacher practice. Additionally, the State's work was noted in a publication on aligning college- and career-ready standards with instructional observation frameworks and rubrics. The publication outlined four guiding principles for better aligning instructional observation frameworks and rubrics with the CCSS.<sup>23</sup>

In SY 2013-2014, LEAs and educators statewide began conducting NCEES processes through a new online platform, hosted within Home Base. As with the previous online system, principals and teachers utilized the platform for all steps of the evaluation process, including self-assessments, observations, professional development plans, conferencing, and ratings. Throughout the school year,

<sup>22</sup> SY 2012-2013 was the first year of data allowed for use in determining an educator's overall effectiveness status, so SY 2014-2015 is the first year in which it is possible for educators to receive such a status. Per an amendment approval in February 2014, North Carolina will allow LEAs the flexibility to use the average of the highest two of three student growth values from SY 2012-2013, SY 2013-2014, and SY 2014-2015 to determine the first overall effectiveness status, delivered in fall 2015. Additionally, the Department approved a delay in the enforcement of consequences for educators who receive a status of "in need of improvement." LEAs have the option to use the first year of status information, delivered in fall 2015, to inform personnel decisions in SY 2015-2016 and are required to use the second year of status information, delivered in fall 2016, to inform personnel decisions in SY 2016-2017.

<sup>23</sup> RSN publications can be found at <http://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/implementation-support-unit/tech-assist/index.html>.

DPI made improvements to the platform based on user feedback (e.g., streamlining the structure of the system to allow for easier navigation through the evaluation process).

North Carolina continued work in Year 4 related to its commitment to develop ways to measure student growth for teachers in non-tested grades and subjects. The State continued to implement and refine the NC Final Exams in SY 2013-2014. DPI addressed logistical challenges experienced by LEAs by printing and shipping copies of the NC Final Exams for their administration in Year 4. The SBE ensured increased standardization in the use of these assessments by approving in fall 2013 a policy that requires districts to use the high school Final Exams as a minimum of 20 percent of a student's final grade for a course. Educators continued to participate in workgroups to further review and refine NC Final Exams items. Further, teachers from traditionally non-tested subjects (e.g., healthful living, the arts) participated in a pilot of the Analysis of Student Work process in spring 2014. The Analysis of Student Work process involves collection and evaluation of student work to document evidence of growth. Finally, the State completed development and made available for LEAs' optional use evaluation instruments for student support staff members (e.g., occupational therapists, school counselors).

Based on higher-than-expected schoolwide growth in SY 2012-2013, educators from 34 of the State's lowest-achieving schools received bonuses in early 2014. An additional 232 teachers in lowest-achieving schools received bonuses as a result of their individual value-added growth being higher than expected. Staff in all lowest-achieving schools are eligible to receive such bonuses again based on SY 2013-2014 State assessment results.

## Ensuring equitable access to effective teachers and principals

North Carolina implemented a multi-pronged approach to increasing the availability of effective teachers and principals to serve students in high-need schools (e.g., low-income, low-performing), carrying out multiple projects related to this goal. Its three RLAs – designed to strengthen the pipeline of high-quality principals in the State, particularly for low-performing schools – continued operations in Year 4. Each RLA accepts cohorts of aspiring principals each year and trains them through coursework, site visits, and administrative internships. In Year 4, two RLAs trained their third cohorts, and one RLA launched its fourth cohort. As of fall 2014, approximately 180 aspiring leaders had participated in and graduated from the three RLAs. Although the State reported that many RLA graduates are working in lower-income and lower-performing schools, just 10 percent have obtained positions in the State's lowest-achieving schools that are part of its Race to the Top Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools initiative.

In Year 4, the State doubled the number of new teachers receiving induction support, expanding the program to over 1,100 teachers from approximately 530 in SY 2012-2013. Still, North Carolina fell

# Great Teachers and Leaders

short of its goal of expanding the program to all regions of the State with low-achieving schools. Induction supports for participating teachers included summer and fall training sessions, classroom observations, and biweekly onsite mentoring and coaching throughout the school year.

The State's two Race to the Top-supported alternative teacher certification programs continued to increase the flow of new teachers into North Carolina schools in SY 2013-2014. Ninety-four North Carolina Teacher Corps members served in North Carolina schools in Year 4, including 75 participants from the program's second cohort and 19 participants from the program's first cohort.<sup>24, 25</sup> With this level of participation, the State fell short of its target of having 150 North Carolina Teachers Corps members during the grant period. The State hired additional coaches to meet the needs of the larger second cohort and provided ongoing professional development to all North Carolina Teacher Corps members. Additionally, the State's Race to the Top-supported Teach For America expansion continued in Year 4, with 285 first and second year corps members teaching in eastern North Carolina in SY 2013-2014. Over the course of the grant period, North Carolina added 334 Teach For America corps members in the State, narrowly missing its target of 340.<sup>26</sup>

The State faced challenges in implementing its strategic staffing and recruitment incentive programs in its lowest-achieving LEAs. Through the strategic staffing initiative, the State's 12 lowest-achieving LEAs received support and consultation as well as a customized report based on historical economic, recruitment, and retention data and interviews with superintendents, human resource staff, parents, and other community stakeholders. This information informed the development of LEA-specific recruitment and retention plans for SY 2013-2014. However, preliminary feedback from LEAs indicated that they were not able to utilize all components of their plans due to the costs associated with implementing some recommendations.

Although incentive funding has been available for the past three years to assist the State's lowest-achieving LEAs in recruiting effective teachers, LEA use of the incentives has been limited. As a result of the challenges the State has faced in encouraging LEAs to use the incentives and based on findings from the Evaluation Team's analysis of this initiative, North Carolina will take an adjusted approach to this initiative in Year 5. Its 12 lowest-achieving LEAs will be eligible to receive subgrants to develop and implement plans to address identified local needs related to equitable access to teachers and leaders.

<sup>24</sup> At the time of the Year 3 report, the State reported that 74 North Carolina Teacher Corps participants had obtained teaching positions for SY 2013-2014. Later, this figure increased to 75.

<sup>25</sup> In summer 2013, the North Carolina General Assembly mandated that Teach For America assume responsibility for continued operation of the North Carolina Teacher Corps beginning in spring 2014.

<sup>26</sup> The State's Teach For America participation target was based on a goal of increasing the number of Teach For America corps members in the State, beyond the number of corps members that otherwise would have participated, by 340. Approximately 50 to 60 corps members began teaching in North Carolina each year prior to the beginning of the Race to the Top grant period, so the State's goal was to increase that level of participation by 340 corps members over the course of the grant period.

## Improving the effectiveness of teacher and principal preparation programs

North Carolina took steps to improve its teacher and principal preparation programs by increasing transparency about program outcomes and holding preparation programs accountable for their performance. In fall 2013, the State released its redesigned institution of higher education report cards for the second time. The report cards include a streamlined display of the program-related data institutions of higher education historically submitted for other programs (e.g., Title II of the Higher Education Act) as well as information on preparation program graduates' results on each standard of the NCEES, including a measure of how program graduates impact student learning. By the end of SY 2013-2014, the State had made publicly available information on the achievement and growth of approximately 86 percent of teacher preparation programs in the State.<sup>27</sup> Although the State originally intended to make similar information available for all of its principal preparation programs, it had not yet done so as of the end of Year 4.

## Providing effective support to teachers and principals

The State established the Professional Development Initiative framework to provide strategic support to educators around Race to the Top reforms. The Professional Development Initiative builds on the State's existing regional and statewide programs and resources to create a comprehensive, targeted, and flexible system to strengthen State and LEA capacity to support educators. Over the course of the grant period, the Professional Development Initiative team has developed and delivered a variety of professional development trainings and resources, expanding the number of offerings each year. In SY 2013-2014, the State delivered over 325 face-to-face sessions, 130 webinars, and 36 online professional development modules. The Race to the Top Evaluation Team found that educators were satisfied with the quality of face-to-face and online professional development offerings. For example, between 87 and 95 percent of participants agreed or strongly agreed that face-to-face sessions were of high quality and between 81 and 97 percent of participants agreed or strongly agreed that they better understood State-level priorities (e.g., transition to new standards) as a result of participating in professional development. In order to meet the needs of LEAs and educators as implementation of key reform initiatives progresses, Year 4 trainings built on topics from prior years and offered more in-depth examination of the NCEES, Standard Course of Study, and data literacy. North Carolina also provided opportunities for LEAs to collaborate and share best practices and lessons learned through its 2014 Summer Institutes and biannual "fidelity support" sessions.

<sup>27</sup> At the end of SY 2012-2013, North Carolina reported that it had made publicly available information on the achievement and growth of approximately 94 percent of the teacher preparation programs in the State. According to the State, the decrease from SY 2012-2013 to SY 2013-2014 was due to several preparation programs not having enough data to meet the minimum sample size for data to be publicly reported in SY 2013-2014.

# Great Teachers and Leaders

These sessions were an opportunity for LEA teams to reflect on progress and establish connections with other LEAs, and also provided insight to Professional Development and Regional Leads to help them target supports or highlight strong local practices.

During Year 4, North Carolina expanded its DLP program. In addition to providing training and networking opportunities to veteran principals through Principal Institutes, in response to needs expressed by the field, the State began a program to support local superintendents and a program for principals focused on supporting digital teaching and learning within their schools. As of spring 2014, over 900 principals, assistant principals, and superintendents had participated in DLP. (For information about professional development designed for principals in low-performing schools, see *Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools*.)

In spring 2014, DPI and the Governor's office launched the Governor's Teacher Network, an initiative that is intended to provide an opportunity for educators to participate in the development and dissemination of professional development resources and strengthen local capacity to implement reform initiatives after the end of the Race to the Top grant period. In June 2014, the State announced the selection of 446 educators who will continue their teaching roles during SY 2014-2015 while also serving in the Network. They are expected to design professional development materials and instructional and formative assessment resources to be shared statewide through Home Base.

## Professional Development for Principals

The Distinguished Leadership in Practice (DLP) program utilizes a problem-based and experiential approach that involves approximately 250 hours of face-to-face and online professional development over the course of one year. The Race to the Top Evaluation Team's analysis of the DLP program included promising initial findings about the value of this professional development opportunity for practicing principals. Ninety-two percent of participants agreed or strongly agreed that the program as a whole was of high quality. Ninety-five percent of participants agreed or strongly agreed that the face-to-face sessions were relevant to their professional development needs and provided them with useful resources. Nearly half of the participants from the second DLP cohort reported that over the course of their participation in the program, they had improved their leadership levels, as measured by the North Carolina Educator Evaluation System standards. Further, 88 percent reported improvements in their schools' cultures and approximately 75 percent noticed improvements in student achievement since they began participating in DLP.

## Successes and challenges

LEAs continued to make progress implementing components of the NCEES in SY 2013-2014, in preparation for providing educators with their initial overall effectiveness statuses following SY 2014-2015. DPI used feedback from the field as well as data analyses to inform training and resource development to support local use of the educator evaluation system. Still, North Carolina recognizes that it will need to continue to partner with LEAs to build capacity to provide meaningful feedback to improve educator practice and use evaluation information to inform support to educators and personnel decision-making. Ongoing communication about the inclusion of student growth in the NCEES is needed to promote stakeholder understanding so that this information can be used meaningfully prior to the availability of overall effectiveness statuses.

Over the course of the grant period, North Carolina made available an extensive number and wide variety of professional development opportunities to educators across the State. Additionally, the State adjusted the nature of its supports to reflect LEAs' progress and increasing capacity (e.g., providing opportunities for LEAs and educators to lead sessions, share innovative ideas, and seek training targeted to their needs). Still, the State recognizes that it is challenging to reach the entire educator workforce, that local redelivery of training is necessary, and that its capacity to continue delivering such a high level of support will likely become more limited after the end of the grant period. Peer-to-peer sharing, including LEA-led training and educator-developed resources, will be an important strategy as the State continues to support LEAs in ongoing implementation.

The State carried out most of its plans related to promoting equitable access to teachers and leaders over the course of the grant period, and some of these initiatives experienced notable increases in participation in Year 4. Still, the State faced challenges in ensuring that these programs reached its lowest-achieving schools and districts to the intended extent and will need additional time to evaluate their impact. Additionally, while North Carolina reported that it intends in the future to make publicly available information about the achievement and growth of principal preparation programs graduates' students, it had not yet done so as of the end of Year 4.



# Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools

Race to the Top States are supporting LEAs' implementation of far-reaching reforms to turn around lowest-achieving schools by implementing one of four school intervention models.

Partnering with and providing targeted resources to bolster the performance of its lowest-achieving schools and districts was another important element of the State's overall Race to the Top vision. North Carolina's efforts to improve achievement in its lowest-performing schools continued in SY 2013-2014, with ongoing implementation of school intervention models, training for teachers and leaders, and coaching customized to meet LEA and school needs. In Year 4, the majority of the 104 schools receiving targeted support through this initiative continued to implement transformation models, with smaller proportions implementing the turnaround and school closure models.<sup>28</sup> DPI's District and School Transformation Division principally delivers supports to these schools, as well as to 12 districts with clusters of underperformance, by deploying approximately 70 district transformation, school transformation, and instructional coaches. Coaches are matched with LEAs and schools based on identified needs and become embedded in LEA and school routines. Based on collaboration with school- and district-level staff as well as analyses of student outcomes data, coaches continuously adjust supports to meet local needs.

Principals from the State's lowest-achieving schools continued to attend Professional Development for School Leaders sessions in SY 2013-2014. These trainings, tailored to the needs of leaders of low-performing schools, included topics such as: establishing correlations between teacher evaluations and student achievement results; literacy for leadership; guidance for classroom observations; and understanding and reaching all students. Recognizing that principals in low-performing schools have variable levels of experience and different needs, North Carolina differentiated professional development by encouraging some leaders to continue attending Professional Development for School Leaders sessions and others to participate in the DLP program (see *Great Teachers and Leaders* for more information).

Student outcome data illustrate the notable progress made by many of North Carolina's lowest-achieving schools over the course of the grant period. Based on SY 2013-2014 results, 83 percent of the schools initially identified as being in the lowest-performing five percent of schools at the beginning of the grant period have improved their performance and are no longer ranked in the lowest-performing five percent of schools in the State. Sixty-seven percent of these schools are no longer in the lowest-performing ten percent of schools in the State. The Evaluation Team found that the schools served through this Race to the Top initiative increased proficiency rates by an average of nearly eight percentage points from SY 2009-2010 to

SY 2011-2012, as compared to an average increase of approximately one percentage point across all schools statewide. Whereas in SY 2009-2010, nine schools of these schools had graduation rates below 60 percent, by SY 2012-2013, no school had a graduation rate below 70 percent. According to State analyses, 74 percent of these schools met or exceeded their EVAAS growth goals for SY 2012-2013. Still, some schools have not made as much progress and continue to require additional intervention and support. Twenty-nine schools initially identified as lowest-achieving in SY 2010-2011 remained in the lowest-performing five percent of schools in the State as of spring 2014.

North Carolina continued to participate in the RSN's Performance Management for School Turnaround workgroup in Year 4. During SY 2013-2014, the workgroup focused on building strong performance management systems and planning for the sustainability of work related to turning around lowest-achieving schools beyond the Race to the Top grant period.

## Successes and challenges

Through this component of its Race to the Top plan, North Carolina identified, intervened in, and provided targeted support to its lowest-achieving schools and districts. Additionally, it has developed partnerships with those LEAs and schools, embedding DPI coaches in local routines and processes, and allowed them flexibility to make strategy and implementation adjustments to foster continuous improvement. As described above, these efforts have contributed to improved student outcomes in many of the targeted schools, while a limited number of schools remain in the lowest-achieving five percent in North Carolina and require ongoing support and intervention.

The State recognizes that sustainability, both of supports and of improvements achieved, is important, particularly as the Race to the Top grant period nears its end. In SY 2014-2015, coaches will continue to serve a subset of schools in greatest need of additional support based on SY 2013-2014 State assessment results and other factors.<sup>29</sup> Additionally, North Carolina intends to continue utilizing State and other federal funds to support low-performing schools across the State. Given the intensive support field-based staff have provided in the past, additional time is needed to determine whether the gains made can be maintained and to assess the extent to which LEAs and schools have built capacity to sustain these improvements without the same level of support.

<sup>28</sup> In SY 2010-2011, North Carolina identified 118 schools as the lowest-achieving five percent of all schools in the State. Since that time, 14 of those schools have closed.

<sup>29</sup> During SY 2014-2015, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (DPI) intends to continue providing supports to 76 schools (of the originally identified 118 schools) that remain among the lowest-achieving 15 percent of schools in the State.



# Emphasis on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM)

Race to the Top States are committed to providing a high-quality plan with a rigorous course of study in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). In doing so, each State must cooperate with STEM-capable community partners in order to prepare and assist teachers in integrating STEM content across grades and disciplines, in promoting effective and relevant instruction, and in offering applied learning opportunities for students. A focus on STEM furthers the goal of preparing more students for an advanced study in sciences, technology, engineering, and mathematics, including among underrepresented groups such as female students.

## State's STEM initiatives

Recognizing the importance of STEM education to its goal of preparing students for success in college and career, North Carolina implemented STEM-focused projects throughout the grant period. Through Race to the Top, North Carolina expanded its partnership with NC New Schools to develop STEM Affinity Networks and Anchor Schools.<sup>30</sup> The STEM Affinity Networks are intended to connect schools and help them implement and share innovative instructional practices, curriculum development strategies, models of collaboration with external partners, and uses of technology in the classroom. Each school focuses on a STEM field critical to the State's economy: energy, aerospace, health and life science, and biotechnology and agriscience. In SY 2013-2014, 4 Anchor Schools and 16 Affinity Network schools – which were initially established in SYs 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 – continued operations.

In collaboration with NC New Schools, the State provided support to teachers and school leaders in the Anchor and Affinity Network schools over the course of the school year, including approximately 2,800 days of instructional coaching, leadership coaching, and professional development across the schools. Additionally, each STEM Affinity Network was supported by an Industry Innovation Council, composed of industry professionals and higher education representatives, in Year 4. The State reported that the Councils facilitated connections between educators and industry experts (*e.g.*, through summer externships and conferences) and promoted the sharing of best practices both within and across schools.

Additionally, in collaboration with the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics, the State continued development of a STEM curriculum in Year 4. The State completed and made available for piloting “level one” and “level two” courses in SY 2013-2014, and some teachers in the Anchor and Affinity Network schools used course materials to develop lesson plans or create projects. By the end of SY 2013-2014, North Carolina completed “level three” and “level four” courses and planned to make course materials available for piloting in SY 2014-2015.<sup>31</sup>

North Carolina also continued development of STEM coursework through its Virtual and Blended Courses initiative, which is intended to provide access to rigorous and high-quality STEM coursework to students at risk of low achievement in science and mathematics. In partnership with North Carolina Virtual Public Schools, the State had developed and piloted a total of five courses with more than 300 students in three LEAs by the end of SY 2013-2014. Throughout the school year, the State provided site-based and virtual training for teachers participating in the initiative. North Carolina completed two additional courses in summer 2014 and plans to pilot these courses in Year 5. Although the State intended to pilot both mobile and non-mobile versions of these courses, it had not yet done so by the end of Year 4, due to budget and staffing constraints in pilot LEAs. The State reported in summer 2014 that North Carolina Virtual Public Schools was beginning to develop the courses in additional delivery formats (*e.g.*, non-mobile and fully virtual) to make the content developed accessible for delivery in different contexts across the State. Additionally, although the State initially intended to develop one additional course in Year 5, it determined in fall 2014 that this would not be possible due to overlapping course content between this course and previously developed courses as well as a need to focus on revising other courses for additional delivery formats.

As a part of the NC STEM Strategic Plan, the State established a STEM Attributes Implementation Rubric and STEM Recognition Program to identify schools that are implementing high-quality STEM programs. A school completes a self-assessment of the status of its STEM program, and DPI staff and business and industry experts review the information to provide feedback to the school on the strengths and weaknesses of its program. Following a pilot of the process in SY 2012-2013, 21 schools applied for participation in the program in Year 4 and the State identified 12 schools for participation in the program in fall 2014. North Carolina also launched its NC STEM Center, an online portal for STEM resources and networking, in summer 2014.

<sup>30</sup> NC New Schools was formerly known as the “New Schools Project.”

<sup>31</sup> The science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) curriculum offers courses in each of the four STEM areas, covering basic (“level one”) to advanced (“level four”) content.

# Emphasis on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM)

## Successes and challenges

Over the course of the grant period, North Carolina met its commitment to establish and support the implementation of STEM models in 4 Anchor and 16 Affinity Network schools will continue to receive supports through the implementation of intervention models and strategic placement of coaches. DPI will continue to monitor implementation, track progress, and differentiate supports, while building local capacity to sustain improvements and promising practices in the future. Coaching, professional development, and curriculum development proceeded as planned. However, given that the schools are still in the early stages of implementation, the State does not yet have evidence (*e.g.*, information about students' postsecondary and career trajectories) about the impacts and outcomes in those schools that could help to inform future implementation. Additionally, the variability in implementation strategies across schools – important to allow schools to meet their needs and try out

innovative approaches – makes it challenging to assess promising practices and apply lessons learned from initial implementation.

Although the State is on track to complete seven virtual and blended STEM courses by the end of Year 5, North Carolina experienced delays in this initiative that led to courses being available for use later than initially intended and the State will not be able to complete the eighth course as planned. Additionally, it is not clear whether it will be feasible for these courses to be used beyond the three pilot LEAs in the future. Currently, only mobile versions of the courses are available, which may limit some LEAs' ability to use them.

The State's STEM Recognition Program provides a means of defining and assessing the extent to which schools across the State are providing quality STEM education. After schools are identified for participation in the program, it will be important for the State to identify best practices and create networking opportunities for these schools as well as other STEM-focused schools across the State.

## Looking Ahead

Most Race to the Top States developed plans to continue their comprehensive reform efforts for an additional year (through the no-cost extension) and are developing plans to sustain many of their projects beyond the grant period.

North Carolina will continue to carry out many of the reforms and projects that it launched through Race to the Top in SY 2014-2015, using both Race to the Top funds and other resources. In addition to the State-led projects that will continue in Year 5, North Carolina approved 68 LEAs to continue local activities until June 30, 2015.

Year 5 presents an opportunity for the State to fully realize its Cloud and Home Base plans. In addition to helping LEAs migrate to existing Cloud services, it intends to make additional Cloud-based systems and services available and to provide funding to LEAs to support technology infrastructure upgrades. Through IAM, North Carolina intends to provide LEA- and school-level users with access to additional local and State systems through a single sign-on. In SY 2014-2015, North Carolina anticipates that all Home Base components will be fully functional. As LEAs enter the second year of Home Base implementation, DPI will encourage the meaningful integration of its components into daily instructional practice through ongoing training and partnering with LEAs to gather and share best practices.

As LEAs and educators continue to adjust to new standards and assessments as well as the NCEES in Year 5, the State will provide support through the ongoing development and dissemination of professional development materials and instructional resources. DPI will continue programs such as the Professional Development Initiative and the Governor's Teacher Network in Year 5 in order to ensure that educators' and LEAs' needs are being met. North Carolina will also continue its efforts to strengthen LEA and school leaders through DLP Institutes. During SY 2014-2015, the CCSS and North Carolina Essential Standards will continue to be used in classrooms across the State. Following SY 2014-2015, North Carolina educators will receive educator effectiveness statuses, summative evaluation ratings including student growth data, for the first time.

The State's teacher and leader pipeline work will continue in SY 2014-2015, but in some cases will take on slightly different forms than during the grant period. DPI will continue to support the second cohort of North Carolina Teacher Corps members, but will not recruit a new cohort for SY 2014-2015, given that Teach For America is

## Looking Ahead

responsible for this program going forward. The State expects that Teach For America will recruit and place additional corps members in SY 2014-2015. Although RLAs will no longer be supported by Race to the Top funding, an alternative funding source has been identified to support the continuation of one RLA and the others are seeking alternative resources to support continued operations. North Carolina will implement an adjusted approach to promoting equitable access to effective teachers and leaders across the State in Year 5. With the support of Race to the Top subgrant funding, its 12 lowest-achieving districts will identify gaps in their current staffing and propose and carry out customized plans for addressing these issues.

While the State's lowest-achieving schools and districts have made progress over the past four years, DPI will continue its improvement efforts in Year 5. A selected group of lowest-achieving schools will continue to receive supports through the implementation of intervention models and strategic placement of coaches. DPI will continue to monitor implementation, track progress, and differentiate supports, while building local capacity to sustain improvements and promising practices in the future.

## Budget

For the State's expenditures through June 30, 2014, please see the APR Data Display at <http://www.rtt-apr.us>.

For State budget information see <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/state-scope-of-work/index.html>.

For the State's fiscal accountability and oversight report see <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/performance-fiscal-accountability.html>.

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**Alternative routes to certification:** Pathways to certification that are authorized under the State's laws or regulations that allow the establishment and operation of teacher and administrator preparation programs in the State, and that have the following characteristics (in addition to standard features such as demonstration of subject-matter mastery, and high-quality instruction in pedagogy and in addressing the needs of all students in the classroom including English learners and students with disabilities): (1) can be provided by various types of qualified providers, including both institutions of higher education (IHEs) and other providers operating independently IHEs; (2) are selective in accepting candidates; (3) provide supervised, school-based experiences and ongoing support such as effective mentoring and coaching; (4) significantly limit the amount of coursework required or have options to test out of courses; and (5) upon completion, award the same level of certification that traditional preparation programs award upon completion.

**Amendment requests:** In the event that adjustments are needed to a State's approved Race to the Top plan, the grantee must submit an amendment request to the Department for consideration. Such requests may be prompted by an updated assessment of needs in that area, revised cost estimates, lessons learned from prior implementation efforts, or other circumstances. Grantees may propose revisions to goals, activities, timelines, budget, or annual targets, provided that

the following conditions are met: the revisions do not result in the grantee's failure to comply with the terms and conditions of this award and the program's statutory and regulatory provisions; the revisions do not change the overall scope and objectives of the approved proposal; and the Department and the grantee mutually agree in writing to the revisions. The Department has sole discretion to determine whether to approve the revisions or modifications. If approved by the Department, a letter with a description of the amendment and any relevant conditions will be sent notifying the grantee of approval. (For additional information, please see <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/amendments/index.html>.)

**America COMPETES Act elements:** The twelve indicators specified in section 6401(e)(2)(D) of the America COMPETES Act are: (1) a unique statewide student identifier that does not permit a student to be individually identified by users of the system; (2) student-level enrollment, demographic, and program participation information; (3) student-level information about the points at which students exit, transfer in, transfer out, drop out, or complete P-16 education programs; (4) the capacity to communicate with higher education data systems; (5) a State data audit system assessing data quality, validity, and reliability; (6) yearly test records of individual students with respect to assessments under section 1111(b) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) (20 U.S.C.

# Glossary

6311(b)); (7) information on students not tested by grade and subject; (8) a teacher identifier system with the ability to match teachers to students; (9) student-level transcript information, including information on courses completed and grades earned; (10) student-level college-readiness test scores; (11) information regarding the extent to which students transition successfully from secondary school to postsecondary education, including whether students enroll in remedial coursework; and (12) other information determined necessary to address alignment and adequate preparation for success in postsecondary education.

**American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA):** On February 17, 2009, President Obama signed into law the ARRA, historic legislation designed to stimulate the economy, support job creation, and invest in critical sectors, including education. The Department of Education received a \$97.4 billion appropriation.

**Annual Performance Report (APR):** Report submitted by each grantee with outcomes to date, performance against the measures established in its application, and other relevant data. The Department uses data included in the APRs to provide Congress and the public with detailed information regarding each State's progress on meeting the goals outlined in its application. The annual State APRs are found at [www.rtt-apr.us](http://www.rtt-apr.us).

**College- and career-ready standards:** State-developed standards that build toward college and career readiness by the time students graduate from high school.

**Common Core State Standards (CCSS):** Kindergarten through twelfth grade (K-12) English language arts and mathematics standards developed in collaboration with a variety of stakeholders including governors, chief State school officers, content experts, teachers, school administrators, and parents. (For additional information, please see <http://www.corestandards.org/>).

The **education reform areas** for Race to the Top: (1) Standards and Assessments: Adopting rigorous college- and career-ready standards and assessments that prepare students for success in college and career; (2) Data Systems to Support Instruction: Building data systems that measure student success and support educators and decision-makers in their efforts to improve instruction and increase student achievement; (3) Great Teachers and Great Leaders: Recruiting, developing, retaining, and rewarding effective teachers and principals; and (4) Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools: Supporting local educational agencies' (LEAs') implementation of far-reaching reforms to turn around lowest-achieving schools by implementing school intervention models.

**Effective teacher:** A teacher whose students achieve acceptable rates (*e.g.*, at least one grade level in an academic year) of student growth (as defined in the Race to the Top requirements). States, LEAs, or schools must include multiple measures, provided that teacher effectiveness

is evaluated, in significant part, by student growth (as defined in the Race to the Top requirements). Supplemental measures may include, for example, multiple observation-based assessments of teacher performance.

**High-minority school:** A school designation defined by the State in a manner consistent with its Teacher Equity Plan. The State should provide, in its Race to the Top application, the definition used.

**High-poverty school:** Consistent with section 1111(h)(1)(C)(viii) of the ESEA, a school in the highest quartile of schools in the State with respect to poverty level, using a measure of poverty determined by the State.

**Highly effective teacher:** A teacher whose students achieve high rates (*e.g.*, one and one-half grade levels in an academic year) of student growth (as defined in the Race to the Top requirements). States, LEAs, or schools must include multiple measures, provided that teacher effectiveness is evaluated, in significant part, by student growth (as defined in the Race to the Top requirements). Supplemental measures may include, for example, multiple observation-based assessments of teacher performance or evidence of leadership roles (which may include mentoring or leading professional learning communities) that increase the effectiveness of other teachers in the school or LEA.

**Instructional improvement systems (IIS):** Technology-based tools and other strategies that provide teachers, principals, and administrators with meaningful support and actionable data to systemically manage continuous instructional improvement, including such activities as instructional planning; gathering information (*e.g.*, through formative assessments (as defined in the Race to the Top requirements), interim assessments (as defined in the Race to the Top requirements), summative assessments, and looking at student work and other student data); analyzing information with the support of rapid-time (as defined in the Race to the Top requirements) reporting; using this information to inform decisions on appropriate next instructional steps; and evaluating the effectiveness of the actions taken. Such systems promote collaborative problem-solving and action planning; they may also integrate instructional data with student-level data such as attendance, discipline, grades, credit accumulation, and student survey results to provide early warning indicators of a student's risk of educational failure.

**Invitational priorities:** Areas of focus that the Department invited States to address in their Race to the Top applications. Applicants did not earn extra points for addressing these focus areas, but many grantees chose to create and fund activities to advance reforms in these areas.

**Involved LEAs:** LEAs that choose to work with the State to implement those specific portions of the State's plan that necessitate full or nearly-full statewide implementation, such as transitioning to a common set



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of K-12 standards (as defined in the Race to the Top requirements). Involved LEAs do not receive a share of the 50 percent of a State's grant award that it must subgrant to LEAs in accordance with section 14006(c) of the ARRA, but States may provide other funding to involved LEAs under the State's Race to the Top grant in a manner that is consistent with the State's application.

**No-Cost Extension (Year 5):** A no-cost extension provides grantees with additional time to spend their grants (until September 2015) to accomplish the reform goals, deliverables and commitments in its Race to the Top application and approved Scope of Work. Grantees made no-cost extension amendment requests to extend work beyond the final project year, consistent with the Amendment Principles (<http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/grant-amendment-submission-process-oct-4-2011.pdf>) as well as the additional elements outlined in the Department Review section of the Amendment Requests with No Cost Extension Guidance and Principles document (<http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/no-cost-extension-submission-process.pdf>).

**Participating LEAs:** LEAs that choose to work with the State to implement all or significant portions of the State's Race to the Top plan, as specified in each LEA's agreement with the State. Each participating LEA that receives funding under Title I, Part A will receive a share of the 50 percent of a State's grant award that the State must subgrant to LEAs, based on the LEA's relative share of Title I, Part A allocations in the most recent year at the time of the award, in accordance with section 14006(c) of the ARRA. Any participating LEA that does not receive funding under Title I, Part A (as well as one that does) may receive funding from the State's other 50 percent of the grant award, in accordance with the State's plan.

**The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC):** One of two consortia of States awarded grants under the Race to the Top Assessment program to develop next-generation assessment systems that are aligned to common K-12 English language and mathematics standards and that will accurately measure student progress toward college and career readiness. (For additional information, please see <http://www.parcconline.org/>.)

**Persistently lowest-achieving schools:** As determined by the State, (1) any Title I school in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring that (a) is among the lowest-achieving five percent of Title I schools in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring or the lowest-achieving five Title I schools in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring in the State, whichever number of schools is greater; or (b) is a high school that has had a graduation rate as defined in 34 CFR 200.19(b) that is less than 60 percent over a number of years; and (2) any secondary school that is eligible for, but does not receive, Title I funds that (a) is among the lowest-achieving five percent of secondary schools or the lowest-achieving five secondary schools in the State that are eligible for, but do not receive, Title I funds, whichever number of schools is greater; or (b) is a high school that has had a graduation rate as defined in 34 CFR 200.19(b) that

is less than 60 percent over a number of years. To identify the lowest-achieving schools, a State must take into account both (1) the academic achievement of the "all students" group in a school in terms of proficiency on the State's assessments under section 1111(b)(3) of the ESEA in reading/language arts and mathematics combined; and (2) the school's lack of progress on those assessments over a number of years in the "all students" group. (For additional information, please see <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/sif/index.html>.)

**Qualifying evaluation systems:** Educator evaluation systems that meet the following criteria: rigorous, transparent, and fair evaluation systems for teachers and principals that: (1) differentiate effectiveness using multiple rating categories that take into account data on student growth as a significant factor, and (2) are designed and developed with teacher and principal involvement.

**Reform Support Network (RSN):** In partnership with the Implementation and Support Unit (ISU), the RSN offers collective and individualized technical assistance and resources to grantees of the Race to the Top education reform initiative. The RSN's purpose is to support the Race to the Top grantees as they implement reforms in education policy and practice, learn from each other and build their capacity to sustain these reforms.

The **School Improvement Grants (SIG)** program is authorized under section 1003(g) of Title I of the ESEA. Funds are awarded to States to help them turn around persistently lowest-achieving schools. (For additional information, please see <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/sif/index.html>.)

**School intervention models:** A State's Race to the Top plan describes how it will support its LEAs in turning around the lowest-achieving schools by implementing one of the four school intervention models:

- **Turnaround model:** Replace the principal and rehire no more than 50 percent of the staff and grant the principal sufficient operational flexibility (including in staffing, calendars/time and budgeting) to fully implement a comprehensive approach to substantially improve student outcomes.
- **Restart model:** Convert a school or close and reopen it under a charter school operator, a charter management organization, or an education management organization that has been selected through a rigorous review process.
- **School closure:** Close a school and enroll the students who attended that school in other schools in the district that are higher achieving.
- **Transformation model:** Implement each of the following strategies: (1) replace the principal and take steps to increase teacher and school leader effectiveness, (2) institute comprehensive instructional reforms, (3) increase learning time and create community-oriented schools, and (4) provide operational flexibility and sustained support.



# Glossary

**Single sign-on:** A user authentication process that permits a user to enter one name and password in order to access multiple applications.

The **SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium (Smarter Balanced):** One of two consortia of States awarded grants under the Race to the Top Assessment program to develop next-generation assessment systems that are aligned to common K-12 English language and mathematics standards and that will accurately measure student progress toward college- and career-readiness. (For additional information, please see <http://www.k12.wa.us/SMARTER/default.aspx>.)

The **State Scope of Work:** A detailed document for the State's projects that reflects the grantee's approved Race to the Top application. The State Scope of Work includes items such as the State's specific goals, activities, timelines, budgets, key personnel, and annual targets for key performance measures. (For additional information, please see <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/state-scope-of-work/index.html>.) Additionally, all participating LEAs are required to submit Scope of Work documents, consistent with State requirements, to the State for its review and approval.

**Statewide longitudinal data systems (SLDS):** Data systems that enhance the ability of States to efficiently and accurately manage, analyze, and use education data, including individual student records. The SLDS help States, districts, schools, educators, and other stakeholders to make data-informed decisions to improve student learning and outcomes, as well as to facilitate research to increase

student achievement and close achievement gaps. (For additional information, please see [http://nces.ed.gov/Programs/SLDS/about\\_SLDS.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/Programs/SLDS/about_SLDS.asp).)

**Student achievement:** For the purposes of this report, student achievement (1) for tested grades and subjects is (a) a student's score on the State's assessments under the ESEA; and, as appropriate, (b) other measures of student learning, such as those described in number (2) of this definition, provided they are rigorous and comparable across classrooms; and (2) for non-tested grades and subjects, alternative measures of student learning and performance such as student scores on pre-tests and end-of-course tests; student performance on English language proficiency assessments; and other measures of student achievement that are rigorous and comparable across classrooms.

**Student growth:** The change in student achievement (as defined in the Race to the Top requirements) for an individual student between two or more points in time. A State may also include other measures that are rigorous and comparable across classrooms.

**Value-added models (VAMs):** A specific type of growth model based on changes in test scores over time. VAMs are complex statistical models that generally attempt to take into account student or school background characteristics in order to isolate the amount of learning attributable to a specific teacher or school. Teachers or schools that produce more than typical or expected growth are said to "add value."