



# Getting Better at Teacher Preparation and State Accountability

Strategies, Innovations, and Challenges  
Under the Federal Race to the Top Program

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# Introduction and summary

A key focus of the Obama administration's Race to the Top initiative in public education is to support states that implement plans for “recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals, especially where they are needed most.” Race to the Top asked states to adopt more vigorous teacher-education accountability mechanisms and to establish or expand programs “that are successful at producing effective teachers.”<sup>1</sup> The winners of the competitive grants are required to

- Link student-achievement and student-growth data to the teachers of these students
- Tie this information to the in-state programs that prepare teachers
- Publicly report the data on program effectiveness for each preparation program in the state
- Expand teacher-education programs and teacher-credentialing options that are successful at producing graduates who are effective teachers

Since the Center for American Progress published “Race to the Top and Teacher Preparation: Analyzing State Strategies for Ensuring Real Accountability and Fostering Program Innovation” in March 2011, the 12 states funded by Race to the Top program in 2010 continued to implement their ambitious agendas. This paper discusses new information about the specifics of these states’ goals, activities, and challenges as part of our profiles of the commitments made by these states to improve teacher education and to strengthen public disclosure and accountability of program performance.

The pages that follow describe the key findings in separate profiles of the 12 winners: Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Maryland, Massachusetts, North Carolina, New York, Ohio, Rhode Island, Tennessee, and the District of Columbia. Then based on analysis of the winning strategies, this paper makes policy recommendations directed to the U.S. Department of Education, the winners, and others interested in teacher quality. Before getting into the individual profiles, however, this paper offers a sketch of the teacher-preparation account-

ability policies recommended by the author in the Center’s July 2010 publication, “[Measuring What Matters: A Stronger Accountability Model for Teacher Education](#),” followed by sections on each state that describe and analyze state commitments on teacher quality and suggest improvements.

Profiles for each grant recipient draw on videotaped presentations as part of the Race to the Top selection process made to the U.S. Department of Education by key state leaders, including information gleaned from videotaped question-and-answer sessions between the state teams and proposal reviewers. After the Race to the Top funds were awarded, all 12 winners established dedicated websites housing important policy papers, requests for proposals to contractors and school districts, initial drafts of design work, meeting agendas, and other information relevant to any analysis of their work. These resources have been employed for the analysis that follows.

The descriptions presented in this document are further supported by the winning grant proposals and by reviewer notes—resources used to produce in-depth descriptions of each winner’s approach to the “Great Teachers and Great Leaders” component of Race to the Top. In each section, strengths and weaknesses of the proposal and current work are discussed, along with commentary and recommendations targeting policy leaders, federal officials, and others interested in successful implementation of Race to the Top strategies.

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## Key findings

Through Race to the Top’s competitive grant process, states agreed to improve accountability for teacher-education programs by adopting and disclosing new measures of program performance. An overview of their combined efforts shows that

- Persistence in teaching by program graduates will be disclosed publicly by 5 of the 12 winners; two states, Massachusetts and New York, will change their teacher-education accountability regulations and use programwide persistence rates for program accountability.
- Six of the 12 winners will employ data on job placement of teacher-preparation program graduates for public disclosure of program performance. Massachusetts, New York, and Rhode Island plan to use job placement as an accountability measure.

- Four recipients will report to the public the percentage of each preparation program’s graduates who attain advanced licensure. New York will prohibit ineffective teachers (as measured by student-achievement outcomes) from advanced licensure, and Rhode Island will use the rate at which program graduates reach the next licensure step as an accountability measure.
- Student-achievement outcomes will be used by all 12 grantees for public disclosure of the teaching effectiveness of program graduates. Only five of them—the District of Columbia, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, and Rhode Island—will employ teacher impact on student achievement for program accountability.

The capacity and commitment of states to implement these Race to the Top activities will determine success or failure. These considerations were central to the proposal review and state-selection processes. Points were awarded or withheld on the basis of reader assessments of state capacity “to implement its proposed plans.” Other factors playing a role in the federal review process for each applicant included:

- The strength of state data systems
- Infrastructure created or improved to support Race to the Top work
- Use of preparation-program outcomes relevant to the world of schools and students
- Commitment to getting the work done in a way that makes a difference for student learning

While assessing state commitment is a judgment call, this paper cites examples where important changes are promised and seem likely to happen. It also notes weaknesses or areas needing improvement where they are found.

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## Recommendations

As the author’s earlier paper on Race to the Top noted, progress on real accountability for teacher preparation will be seen when the 12 funded winners have met all of their commitments, strengthened their capacity to replace current toothless accountability policies, and taken bold steps to assert their authority to impose real consequences on weak and ineffective programs. Race to the Top will be a powerful lever to improve teacher quality throughout the United States through the work of funded states. The policy recommendations presented here are drawn from the analysis of state promises with the aim of maximizing the potential for change through the Race to the Top program.

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## Develop high-quality state data and reporting systems

**The challenge.** All 12 recipients made commitments to develop or improve data systems for public disclosure of preparation-program results. Public disclosure target dates vary widely among the states, and states will have to develop and pilot reliable methods for measuring student-achievement gains and connecting the results to individual teachers.

**Policy recommendation.** The federal government and interested foundations should support an organized program of technical assistance to enable the states to meet their commitments. The goal should be high-quality systems in each of the states, with uniform reporting mechanisms making comparisons between programs and across states easier for the public and for policymakers to use and understand. The Department of Education, state leaders, and outside funders should encourage cross-state consortia focused on data-system development, teacher-effectiveness research, and application of student-achievement and student-growth measures so that we wind up with rigorous and fair judgments about teacher-education programs.

## Pilot stronger measures of preparation-program accountability

**The challenge.** “Measuring What Matters” urged all states and the District of Columbia to base program accountability on five indicators. No winner has adopted all five, and only 5 of the 12 will use teacher effectiveness for preparation-program accountability. The remaining seven stop at public disclosure.

**Policy recommendation.** The Department of Education, the National Governors Association, and education-reform groups should support state and cross-state efforts to pilot the full set of accountability indicators that the Center for American Progress recommended in its paper, “Measuring What Matters.” Work on these teacher-quality issues in the 12 Race to the Top grant recipients will generate strong pressure on the remaining states to adopt meaningful accountability standards, creating new opportunities through technical support and policy changes that lead all states to adopt identical policies for program accountability.

In early October, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan announced draft teacher-preparation program reporting standards under Title II of the Higher Education Amendments. The proposal is for all programs to report on

- The impact of their graduates on student achievement
- Feedback survey findings from graduates and from their school principals
- Job placement and retention rates of graduates

“Measuring What Matters” recommended all three indicators.

## Monitor state performance

**The challenge.** No state has a good record in teacher-education program accountability. Experience with the federal Higher Education Amendments, or HEA, Title II “report card,” which is explained in greater detail in “Measuring What Matters,” shows how little courage states have had to confront and close weak programs. The 12 winners promise to do better through their Race to the Top proposals but too few of them go beyond promises of public disclosure for preparation-program performance.

**Policy recommendation.** The federal government, education funders, state governors, and the mayor of Washington, D.C., ought to gauge Race to the Top promises against actual performance over the next few years, particularly since implementation of these initiatives is being assigned to state departments of education—agencies not known for their commitment to high-quality education reform. Healthy skepticism is a reasonable stance until we see concrete evidence of higher standards, including the voluntary or forced closure of many poorly performing teacher-education programs in the 12 funded states.

In the meantime, the public- and education-policy communities should get regular and candid reports on Race to the Top project implementation and its impact on preparation-program oversight from the U.S. Department of Education and from chief executives of the funded states.

## Work to close the gaps in a fragmented accountability system

**The challenge.** A big problem with any strategy for improving teacher quality in the United States is the proportion of public-school teachers whose students are in grades or subject areas that do not require standardized testing for accountability purposes. Estimates put this at about two-thirds of all teachers in the country. While some states are developing new student assessments for grade levels

or subject areas that will give them the capacity to measure learning outcomes for higher percentages of teachers and their kindergarten-through-12th grade students, others have overlooked this significant hole in accountability and school improvement. A related concern is that hundreds of thousands of teachers in the United States are prepared to teach in a different state from the one where they obtain their first teaching job. For 12 states, including four of the Race to the Top grantees, at least 40 percent of newly certified teachers were prepared in another state. State-specific program-accountability strategies have not addressed problems emanating from the weaknesses of programs preparing these teachers.<sup>2</sup>

**Policy recommendation.** States, the federal government, and other groups interested in improving teacher quality and student performance should “double down” on efforts to develop a much broader array of high-quality student-assessment instruments. And the only solution for our fragmented system of teacher-education accountability is to follow the lead of professions such as medicine, nursing, accountancy, and engineering. Every state employs the same system of accountability indicators in these professions. One set of common standards for teacher preparation programs would ensure that quality is defined the same way no matter where the program is located or where the graduate is employed.<sup>3</sup>

### Lessons for the next round of Race to the Top proposals

Thanks to the budget agreement in April between President Barack Obama and Congress, there will be another round of state Race to the Top grants in fiscal year 2012, awarded sometime after October 1, 2011. Based on this assessment of the winners funded in the first and second competitions, proposal reviewers and federal officials should pay more careful attention to how well the next round of state submissions deal with the most productive leveraging points for real change in teacher quality:

- **Student-growth models.** Every one of the 12 winners promises some method for using student achievement to measure teacher effectiveness, but the promises often come with few details or with few mechanisms to ensure that a state will actually make effective use of the data.
- **Preparation-program indicators.** All 12 winners promised to do the minimum, which is to publicly disclose the effectiveness of preparation-program graduates

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based on student learning outcomes, but real accountability takes more than disclosure, and it requires more than one indicator of performance.

- **State data-system capacity.** The quality and usefulness of state data systems is essential for success under Race to the Top. Indicators of capacity vary widely among the 12 winners, as described in detail in each of their profiles. Proposal reviewers and federal officials should take a hard look at how the state demonstrates its seriousness about improving capacity and using the system for accountability and education reform.

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## And finally some good news

When President Obama submitted his fiscal year 2012 budget to Congress in March, it included provisions that will make a big difference for the nation's teacher quality and student-achievement goals. The proposal would require all teacher-education programs in the country to report their performance on three of the five indicators advocated in "Measuring What Matters." They are the academic achievement of students taught by program graduates, the job-placement and retention rates of program graduates, and survey results from employers and graduates.<sup>4</sup> As noted above, Secretary Duncan has initiated steps to make this a reality through a set of public hearings and negotiated rule-making, necessary actions before final regulations are promulgated. The Obama administration's proposal also would fund a "presidential teaching fellows" program through competitive grants to the states, with grants linked to requirements for more rigorous preparation-program accountability.

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