U.S. Department of Education: Race to the Top Overview

Presentation to States

November 2009

Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you so much for participating in today's call. Here is our agenda:

•First, we're going to talk about timelines and the technical assistance opportunities we have planned.

•Second, we'll give you a brief overview of what changed from the proposed notice to the final one.

•Third, we'll provide a quick guided tour of the documents we released – there are over 1,000 pages, so it will help you to know what's what and what's where.

•Finally, we'll take as many questions as we're able to.

Big Picture

- Clarified and strengthened competition based on public comments:
  - Received more than 1,100 comments, ranging from one paragraph to 67 pages
  - Heard from individuals in all 50 States; over 550 individuals (mostly parents and teachers), 200 organizations, unions, and elected officials
- Stayed firm in commitment to four reforms, but listened and made many specific changes in response to what we heard

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Let's start with the big picture. We clarified and strengthened the competition based on the close-to 1,200 comments we received. These comments ranged from 1 paragraph to 67 pages and came from all 50 states. We heard from over 550 individuals – mostly parents and teachers. We also heard from 200 organizations and associations, both unions, and dozens of elected officials and school chiefs (including many of you). We were heartened by the passion expressed across the country, and hope that this strong interest translates into broad stakeholder engagement in your states.

Overall, we stayed firm in our commitment to the four core reform areas – high, common standards; great teachers and leaders; data to inform decisions and improve practices; and turning around states' lowest-achieving schools.

Competition Timeline

Race to the Top – Phase 1

November 18, 2009	Notices published in the Federal Register
January 19, 2010	Application deadline for Phase 1
April 2010	Winners announced for Phase 1 Feedback provided to applicants who do not win

Race to the Top – Phase 2

June 1, 2010	Application deadline for Phase 2
September 2010	Winners announced for Phase 2

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Before we get into the details, let's talk about the timeline.

The notices were published in the Federal Register on November 18; they are available on the Department's website as well. You'll find them at www.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop. For Phase 1, applications are due on January 19, 2010. Winners will be announced in April. Feedback will be provided to all applicants who do not win.

For Phase 2, applications are due on June 1, 2010. Winners will be announced in September.

As you know, the grant term is 4 years, so the funds will be spent down from 2010 through the 2013-14 school year.

Outreach and Technical Assistance

- Conference calls for Governors, Chiefs and their staffs
  - Orientation about how to efficiently make sense of the notices
  - Q&A
- Technical Assistance Workshops
  - December 3 in Denver
  - December 10 in the Baltimore-Washington area
- FAQs published online
- Questions may be emailed to racetothetop@ed.gov
- Others, as needed – let us know

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We have four different venues for providing technical assistance to states:

•First, we are hosting conference calls, like this one. We have another call planned for Nov 24 at 3pm ET, with the same agenda as today's.

•Second, we are holding Technical Assistance Workshops in early December – one in Denver and one in the DC area. We'll send more information on these soon.

•Third, we will be publishing FAQs on our website, and we'll keep that document updated as we get new questions. The FAQs should be out later this week.

•Fourth, you may submit questions via email to racetothetop@ed.gov, and our staff will get answers back to you.

•Finally, we welcome your ideas on what else we can do to ensure that you get your questions answered in a timely fashion.

Note: Unlike for our formula grants, for the Race to the Top competition, we can only answer technical, logistical, or clarifying questions – we cannot provide one-on-one support or assistance.

Structure of the Notice

States must meet:

Application Requirements, e.g.:

- Signatures of key stakeholders
- Certification from State's attorney general re: descriptions of State laws
- State Reform Conditions requirements
- Reform Plan requirements

Program Requirements:

- Evaluation
- Participating LEA scope of work
- Make work available
- Technical assistance
- State summative assessments

Eligibility Requirements:

- Approved for State Fiscal Stabilization prior to award
- No legal barriers at State level to linking student achievement data to teachers and principals for purposes of evaluation

Applications will be scored based on:

Priorities:

- Absolute: Comprehensive approach to education reform
- Competitive: Emphasis on STEM
- Invitational: Innovations for Improving Early Learning Outcomes
- Invitational: Expansion and adaptation of statewide longitudinal data systems
- Invitational: P-20 coordination, vertical and horizontal alignment
- Invitational: School-level conditions for reform, innovation, and learning

Selection Criteria:

- State Success Factors
- Standards and assessments
- Data systems to support instruction
- Great teachers and leaders
- Turning around the lowest-achieving schools
- General

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Eligibility Requirements

A State must meet the following requirements in order to be eligible to receive funds:

a) The State's applications for funding under Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund program must be approved by the Department prior to the State being awarded a Race to the Top grant.

b) At the time the State submits its application, there must not be any legal, statutory, or regulatory barriers at the State level to linking data on student achievement or student growth to teachers and principals for the purpose of teacher and principal evaluation.

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Now let's turn to the highlights of "what changed":

Let's start with eligibility requirements – there are two. The first is that States' Fiscal Stabilization Fund applications for Phases 1 and 2 must be approved by the Department prior to the State being awarded a Race to the Top grant; the proposed notice said these had to be approved prior to submitting a RTT application, but we have relaxed this a bit. However, we still recommend that States applying for Phase 1 get their applications in by January 11 in order to ensure approval in a timely fashion.

The second is that there cannot be any legal barriers at the State level to linking data on student achievement or growth to teachers and principals for the purpose of teacher and principal evaluation – this one hasn't changed.

A. State Success Factors

(A)(1) Articulating State's education reform agenda and LEAs' participation in it

(A)(2) Building strong statewide capacity to implement, scale up, and sustain proposed plans

(A)(3) Demonstrating significant progress in raising achievement and closing gaps

Key Changes

- Front-end organizer: statewide reform agenda, LEA commitment, State capacity, track record

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The biggest change you'll notice is a new section in the Selection Criteria called State Success Factors. I'd like to take a few moments to talk about this change. We received a lot of comments that suggested that States were treating the 19 selection criteria like a checklist – each one independent and decontextualized.

We wanted to reinforce that Race to the Top provides a vehicle to fund an ambitious, comprehensive reform agenda for the State – so we reorganized several criteria into a "front-end organizer" for the application. This new section asks States to describe their statewide reform agendas, their districts' commitment to participating in Race to the Top, their SEA's capacity to oversee and deliver on the agenda, and their track record of progress and improvement.

We hope that this will allow each State to talk about its unique set of needs and the unique set of strengths and assets on which it is building, in order to set the stage, and the context, for reviewers.

B. Standards and Assessments

State Reform Conditions Criteria

(B)(1) Developing and adopting common standards

(B)(2) Developing and implementing common, high-quality assessments

Reform Plan Criteria

(B)(3) Supporting the transition to enhanced standards and high-quality assessments

Key Changes

- Timing of adoption

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The next four sections deal with the four reform areas. First, standards and assessments. Clearly, the big issue here was timing for adoption of common standards. In the proposed notice, we proposed June 2010 as the date by which common standards had to be adopted in order to earn points. In the final notice, we moved the date as far back as we could, given our need to obligate all funds by September 2010. The new deadline is August 1 – though States can earn "partial credit" for proposing a credible and high-quality plan for adoption within calendar 2010.

C. Data Systems to Support Instruction

State Reform Conditions Criteria

(C)(1) Fully implementing a statewide longitudinal data system

Reform Plan Criteria

(C)(2) Accessing and using State data

(C)(3) Using data to improve instruction

Key Changes

- Emphasis on local tools and professional development

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Next…data systems. This section did not change substantially. The most significant thing we did was to clarify that this section was not all about statewide longitudinal data systems. We are also concerned about local data systems, called "instructional improvement systems," that allow districts to provide realtime data to teachers and principals – data that will help them make better informed, day-to-day instructional decisions.

D. Great Teachers and Leaders

State Reform Conditions Criteria

(D)(1) Providing high-quality pathways for aspiring teachers and principals

Reform Plan Criteria

(D)(2) Improving teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance

(D)(3) Ensuring equitable distribution of effective teachers and principals

(D)(4) Improving the effectiveness of teacher and principal preparation programs

(D)(5) Providing effective support to teachers and principals

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Next comes the section on great teachers and leaders – this is the section that changed the most.

D. Great Teachers and Leaders

Key Changes

- Building high-quality evaluation systems…effectiveness based on multiple measures with growth in student achievement a significant factor
- Getting the best teachers and leaders in the schools that need them most – tightened up the way we look at the distribution across high poverty/minority versus low poverty/minority schools
- Improving teacher and principal preparation
- Providing effective professional development

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The focal point of this section is building high-quality evaluation systems that are used to inform key personnel decisions. These systems are designed to evaluate the effectiveness of teachers and principals based on multiple measures, with growth in student achievement as a significant factor.

These evaluations are the jumping off point for thinking about how to ensure that the most highly effective teachers and principals are in the schools, and working with the children, who need them the most.

And the evaluation data is also used to inform effective and targeted professional development – and to assess the quality of teacher and principal preparation programs.

E. Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools

State Reform Conditions Criteria

(E)(1) Intervening in the lowest-achieving schools and LEAs

Reform Plan Criteria

(E)(2) Turning around the lowest-achieving schools

Key Changes

- Charters moved to General section: correct misperception that charters are the "silver bullet" solution to school turnaround problems
- Consistency in turnaround requirements across Stabilization, School Improvement, and Race to the Top
- All four turnaround models allowed

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The next section, school turnaround, had three significant changes.

•First, we moved the criterion on charter schools into the General section. We did this because it was clear to us, from reading the public comments, that people thought we believed that charters were a "silver bullet" solution to school turnaround problems. In fact, we believe that district leaders are responsible for this critical work, and that districts should have, as core competencies, the ability to turn around persistently low-achieving schools or to shut them down and open new ones in their place. So we moved charters into a different category, though they remain important potential partners to districts in this work.

•Second, we have made the turnaround requirements completely consistent across the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund, Race to the Top, and the upcoming School Improvement Grants – so states may create one list of turnaround schools, and choose to organize and align their funding sources in whatever ways work best for them.

•Finally, all four of the school intervention models are allowed – although in large districts with 10 or more turnarounds, the "transformation" model cannot be used in more than 50% of the schools.

F. General Selection Criteria

State Reform Conditions Criteria

(F)(1) Making education funding a priority

(F)(2) Ensuring successful conditions for high-performing charter schools and other innovative schools

(F)(3) Demonstrating other significant reform conditions

Key Changes

- Funding: added criterion on equitable funding (as well as MOE)
- Charters:
  - Focus on high-performing charters; strengthened authorizer criterion
  - Added criterion for enabling innovative, autonomous public schools other than charters
- Other legal/policy conditions in the State conducive to reform

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The last section is the General section – it includes three criteria.

•The first concerns making education funding a priority. It includes both equitable funding and maintenance of effort. In recognition of the very tough economic year everyone has experienced, this criterion is not heavily weighted.

•The second criterion is the charter criterion. You may remember that this had four parts: caps, accountability and authorizers, access to facilities, and equitable funding. These have not changed substantially, though we did strengthen the authorizer criterion. We also added a fifth part to this criterion, which will give States credit if they enable innovative, autonomous schools – other than charters – to exist.

•Finally, the third criterion asks States to tell us what laws, regulations or policies they have in place – other than those we asked about in the application – that they believe have contributed to creating conditions in the State that are conducive to education reform. Not only is this an acknowledgment that the list of critical conditions goes well beyond those we asked about in the application, it is also the Department's initial attempt to start gathering from States their thoughts on what works.

Priorities

- Priority 1: Absolute – Comprehensive Approach to Education Reform
- Priority 2: Competitive – Emphasis on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM)
- NEW Priority 3: Invitational – Innovations for Improving Early Learning Outcomes
- Priority 4: Invitational – Expansion and Adaptation of Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems
- Priority 5: Invitational – P-20 Coordination, Vertical and Horizontal Alignment
- Priority 6: Invitational – School-Level Conditions for Reform, Innovation, and Learning

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That's it for the selection criteria. Turning to priorities, there are two changes worthy of note.

•First, we added one new invitational priority on early childhood – this priority concerns preschool and the transition from preschool to kindergarten.

•Second, we described how the STEM competitive priority would work. The priority is worth 15 points, and it will be awarded on an all-or-nothing basis to States that develop high-quality plans, across their applications, that are specifically related to STEM issues.

Additional Information

- Scoring Rubric and Points (Appendix B in all notices)
- Budget Guidance (in the notice inviting applications)
- Competition Review and Selection Process (in the notice inviting applications)
- Guidance on signing up LEAs (Appendix D in all notices)
- Evaluation (in the program requirements section of all notices)

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This takes us, then, to the other critical information that we released in the notices.

•First, we released the points allocations and the Scoring Rubric that reviewers will use to judge applications. This information is in Appendix B in every notice.

•Second, we released budget guidance. You'll find this in the notice inviting applications. As a reminder, we organized the States into 5 categories based on the number of students in the State. The award guidance ranges from $20M-$700M – but we want to reiterate that this guidance is nonbinding. The ranges are NOT minimums or maximums! States may propose budgets that are above or below the ranges we provided – the important thing is that the budgets match the work the State is proposing.

•Third, in the notice inviting applications we have also provided an overview of the Competition Review and Selection Process, which describes how the competition itself will be run. It is a two-tiered review process. In tier one, reviewers will read applications and award points for each criterion. The high-scoring applicants will be invited to DC for the finalist tier, where States will present their applications to reviewers and engage in Q&A.

•Finally, we know how much confusion there was around signing up LEAs to participate in the State's plan. We have attempted to clarify this in the final notices, offer thoughts on how to streamline the process, and provide a model MOU that States may use or modify if they feel it would be helpful. This information can be found in each of the notices as Appendix D. And there are FAQs about LEA participation as well.

Race to the Top Resources

Website: www.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop

Posted there, States will find:

- *Notice of Final Priorities, Requirements, Definitions, and Selection Criteria*
- ***Notice Inviting Applications***
- ***Application***
- Supporting Materials:
  - *Executive Summary of Race to the Top Notice of Final Priorities*
  - *Frequently Asked Questions*
  - *Presentations and Transcripts*

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One last bit of information before we turn the floor over to you – we released four documents last week, totaling over 1,000 pages. We know how daunting this likely feels, so let us give you a quick tour of what you have and where to find information.

•The longest document, about 800 pages, is the notice of final priorities. This is so long because it contains the Department's responses to all of the public comments we received.

•The most critical documents for States are the notice inviting applications and the application itself. These are the two documents I would study first.

•We also released an executive summary that is an excerpt from the notices. It includes the "policy" – the eligibility requirements, priorities, selection criteria, and definitions. This is not abridged information; it is complete.

•Finally, we are building an FAQ document that we will keep updated as we get questions from you.

•And we'll post all transcripts from conference calls like this one, and other meetings that we host.

With that…I'll be quiet and start listening. I know you have a lot of questions, and will certainly have even more over the coming weeks as you get deeper into the documents. Let's take the first question now.