SETTING THE PACE: **EXPANDING OPPORTUNITY FOR AMERICA'S STUDENTS UNDER RACE TO THE TOP**

MARCH 2014

A Report on Race to the Top in Its Fourth Year

The Executive Office of the President in Cooperation with the U.S. Department of Education

Setting the Pace: Expanding Opportunity for America's Students under Race to the Top

"The reason I'm here is to make sure that we are giving ... all our children the pathways they need to make the most of their abilities; to make the most of their opportunities; to make the most of their lives. I am absolutely confident that if I do my part, if [Secretary] Arne [Duncan] does his part, if our teachers do their part, if you do yours, if the American people do theirs, then we will not only strengthen our economy over the long run, and we will not only make America's entire education system the envy of the world, but we will launch a Race to the Top that will prepare every child, everywhere in America, for the challenges of the 21st century."

—President Barack Obama
July 24, 2009

Promoting Innovation, Reform and Excellence in America's Schools

Five years ago, President Obama took office at a time when the American education system was at a crossroads. While the *No Child Left Behind* law had forced some important, hard conversations around issues like accountability and equity for all students, highlighting achievement gaps, it also had unintended and unfortunate consequences. Some of these consequences included creating incentives for states to lower standards, mandating one-size-fits-all remedies, and putting standardized testing ahead of a well-rounded curriculum.

Starting with its signature education reform initiative – Race to the Top – the Obama Administration set a new agenda that put state-level innovation at center stage. Race to the Top served as an invitation for states' best ideas on raising standards to prepare all students for college and careers, investing in America's teachers and school leaders, turning around the lowest-performing schools, and using data to inform support for educators and decision-making. With an investment of $4.35 billion – less than 1 percent of total education spending in America – this relatively small component of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 has unleashed enormous positive change, empowering state and local leaders, educators, and communities to put their best ideas into action.

The Race to the Top program has proved that the best and most innovative ideas do not come from Washington. After the program's launch in 2009, dozens of leaders in communities throughout the country answered the call to action and designed new approaches that would better support educators to ensure that students graduate ready for college and careers, enabling students to become productive citizens and out-compete any worker, anywhere in the world. These plans also aimed to better support disadvantaged students and those who have been traditionally underserved, such as low-income and minority students, students with disabilities, and English learners.

"We've become this vast collaborative network, which has been amazing. We're celebrating each other's successes, and when we fail, we pick each other up and provide extensive support."

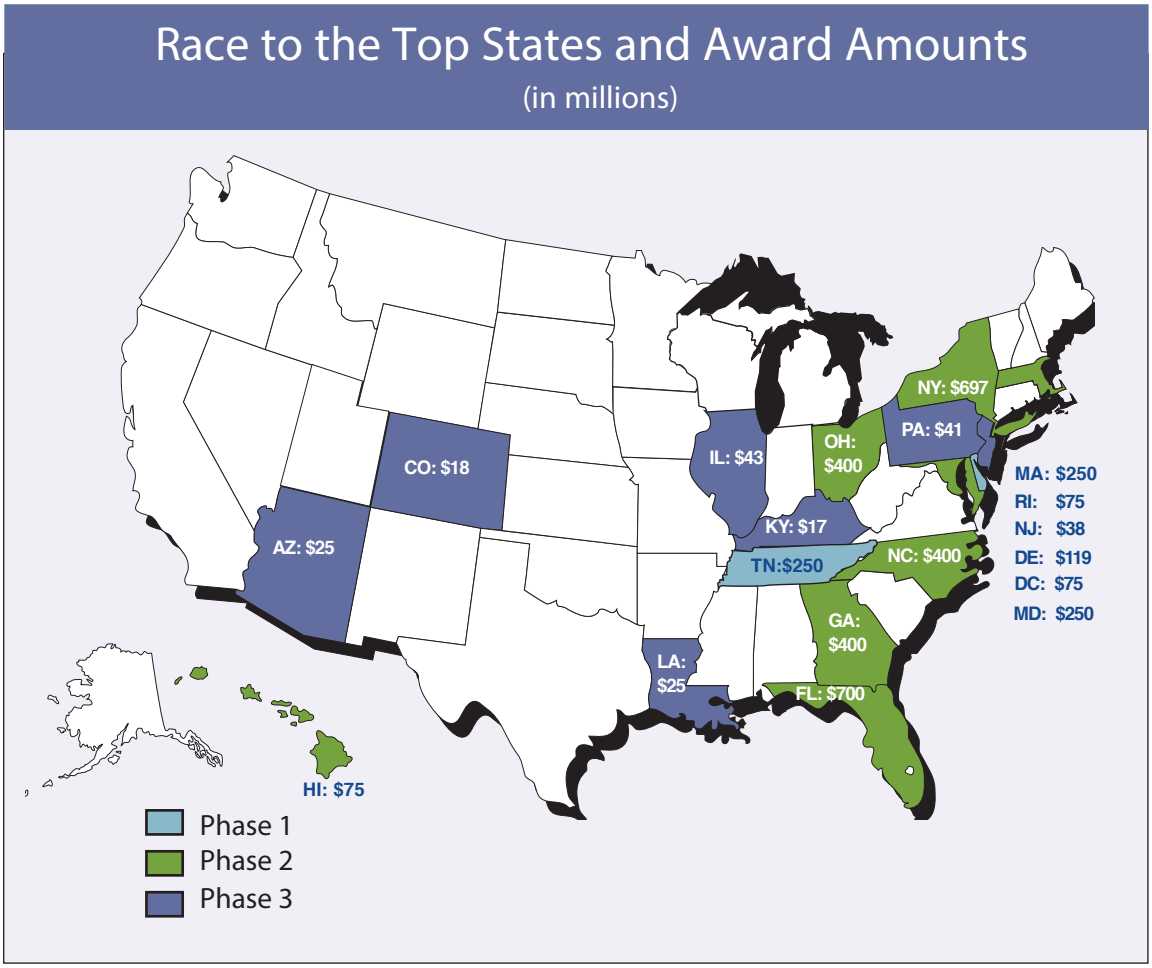
*— **Christopher Bowen**, middle-school science teacher from Johnson City, Tenn., on his relationships with his fellow Core Coaches as they help their peers implement new, higher standards*

In 2010, 11 states and Washington, D.C. received funding under the Race to the Top program. An additional seven states received a total of $200 million in 2011 to put their plans into motion. In states that won Race to the Top grants and in states that did not, state leaders and educators embraced the challenge to bring forward their best ideas to improve education, with determination, courage and vision.

Today, the reach of this comparatively small part of the nation's education budget is striking.

Race to the Top grantees serve 22 million students and 1.5 million teachers in more than 40,000 schools. These states represent 45 percent of all students and a similar percentage of all low-income students.

Now – four years after the Obama administration announced the first Race to the Top grants, awarded to Tennessee and Delaware – many state and local leaders, educators, and communities are deep in the hard work of education improvement. And, amid this climate of reform, the nation is seeing progress. At 80 percent, America's high school graduation rate is the highest on record. Student test scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) are the highest since the test was first given 20 years ago. There have been double-digit gains on state tests at some of the lowest-performing schools – many of which had not seen any improvement for decades. And some of the largest gains have come in the places that have done the most to embrace reform, such as Tennessee and the District of Columbia. In 2014, the signs of state-led progress are clear, as is the catalytic power of Race to the Top in supporting states' growth.



State Strategies

Over the past four years, states have taken action to develop strategies that have created more opportunities for America's students. Race to the Top has unleashed these leaders' creativity and innovation to better support their educators, close achievement gaps, and ensure all students are prepared to succeed in college and careers.

To take action on their ideas, state leaders began to design plans and create the conditions for reform. As the Race to the Top competition got underway, many states changed laws to increase their ability to intervene in their lowest-performing schools or to improve teacher quality, including alternative certification and systems to support educators and evaluate their effectiveness. To date, 46 states and Washington, D.C. have chosen to adopt high college- and career-ready standards, and several states have altered laws or policies to create or expand the number of charter schools. In the end, not all of these states received grants, but the opportunity to compete helped spur much of this change.

The states that won Race to the Top grants continued to lay the groundwork in the early years of the program, transitioning from predominantly compliance-driven organizations into systems that invest in comprehensive supports and tools for their school districts and educators. Now, states and school districts are collaborating in new ways, using data to make informed decisions and developing comprehensive systems to provide feedback and support to teachers and principals. Teachers and school leaders have more resources, like access to data dashboards that let them see a variety of information, job-based coaching support and mentoring, professional development to transition to new standards and assessments, and opportunities to collaborate with their peers that did not exist before. Students have more access to rigorous learning opportunities, college-level courses, Advanced Placement (AP) classes, and science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) education, as well as more opportunities to learn outside of school hours. States have created new systems of support for their lowest-performing schools, targeting significant resources at their improvement, and have created training and development programs to prepare school leaders for success in turning these schools around.

Despite pockets of doubt and debate in state legislatures and at the national level, state and district leaders have had the courage to put these ideas into action. They know their children cannot wait. Teachers and principals have shown up day after day with the same goal that every community shares: making sure each student is prepared to have a successful future and has the opportunity to pursue the American dream.

Ohio Transforms Schools through Innovative Redesign Options

At Winton Woods High School outside of Cincinnati, a junior named Aunay is setting her mind to combatting the problem of child labor around the world for a school project. Meanwhile, in Cleveland, Yasmine, who is a junior at Lincoln West High School, is arguing on behalf of Sierra Leone, the African country her group chose to represent in Model United Nations debates.

The opportunities these schools are providing Aunay, Yasmine, and other students were set in motion by Ohio's Race to the Top program. These schools have won grants over the past two years, enabling them to adopt one of five innovative school redesign models endorsed by the state. Models include early college high schools, which allow students to earn college credits even as they attend high school, and technology-enabled collaborative projects.

The redesigned schools are having a broader impact on the state because they're demonstrating what's possible for students, said Pamela VanHorn, director of the Ohio Network for Innovation and Improvement. Early progress at the schools that adopted the models has created additional demand from other low-performing schools, and 118 now operate one of the models with support from the state. Encouraged by the interest and initial results, the Ohio legislature has allocated state funding to expand the program.

Race to the Top Has Focused Schools on College- and Career-Readiness for All Students

Under Race to the Top, states spearheaded efforts to create plans tailored to their students' needs. Many states also collaborated with each other in new ways to create more opportunities for students, including those who have been traditionally underserved, to achieve their fullest potential. More students now have expanded access to rigorous coursework and the chance to develop stronger critical thinking skills as part of states' efforts to adopt higher standards. States have worked with teachers and school leaders to help prepare educators to meet these new, challenging demands; and while there is still room to improve, there are encouraging signs that the hard work of educators and students is paying off.

States also have designed plans to turn around some of their lowest-performing schools using new ideas that engage students and transform school culture. In addition, states are providing more access to courses that are designed to prepare students for life after high school, such as language immersion, career and technical training opportunities, STEM courses, and AP classes.

"Before [the Academy of Global Studies], I worked more independently. Now I can communicate better with others. We have a family environment. We are all together, and we all support each other."

— **Aunay**, *a junior enrolled in the Academy of Global Studies at Winton Woods High School outside of Cincinnati*

For example, by the end of the 2012-2013 school year:

Hawaii launched a new College and Career Ready diploma two years ahead of schedule to help more students be prepared to pursue their education after high school. It also has started two new "High Tech High Schools" to support state-of-the-art curriculum and learning in STEM education.

Massachusetts provided more students with access to AP classes by training more than 1,100 middle and early high school teachers to prepare their students for new, high academic standards. Initial findings from the external evaluation of Massachusetts' college- and career-readiness initiatives indicate patterns of increased AP course-taking, exam-taking, and exam performance. It also has supported work in five school districts to provide extensive wraparound services for students, such as after-school tutoring and additional learning opportunities, and created STEM Early College High Schools in six school districts.

Tennessee awarded grants or provided Tennessee Academic Specialists to address performance gaps at the 167 schools identified as Focus Schools based on significant achievement gaps in school year 2011-2012. Based on 2012-2013 state assessment results, the state made progress closing achievement gaps in these 167 schools.

Georgia created two non-traditional schools to accommodate high school students at risk of dropping out.

Maryland developed and translated five STEM curriculum modules for use in language programs statewide. Six districts participating in Maryland's world languages project began implementation of elementary school STEM-focused programs to ensure students are proficient in STEM content and languages other than English, including Chinese, Arabic, and Spanish.

Florida Provides STEM Opportunities to Rural Students

Phidell, a high school senior who lives in a thinly populated area of the Florida Panhandle, had two adventures in the summer of 2012.

He spent four days alongside some of the nation's top scientists as part of a group analyzing nanomaterials, tiny particles with special characteristics. He also attended a forum of engineers representing various industries, where he learned that mechanical engineers have skills that can be useful in the field of animation, which Phidell has been considering as a career.

Both opportunities came about because Phidell is one of hundreds of students from rural communities in Florida who are STEM Scholars – part of a new state initiative to expose more students to opportunities in STEM through Florida's Race to the Top grant.

In Florida, business leaders indicate that nearly nine out of 10 new jobs that become available over the next decade will be in STEM fields. The need for an increased emphasis on STEM is particularly acute in rural areas, where many schools are not able to hire fulltime teachers in these fields. Students in the STEM Scholars Program are paired with mentors and receive intensive hands-on experiences with STEM professionals, rigorous courses, leadership training, and opportunities to collaborate with other students.

More than 1,000 high school students have participated in the STEM Scholars program since 2012. Enrollments are up 49 percent since 2009. In some rural counties, students received industry certifications for the first time in 2013.

"Funds from Florida's Race to the Top award have expedited efforts already underway to better prepare students for college and careers," said Brenda Crouch, program manager for the FloridaLearns STEM Scholars Program. "It is a win for Florida's economic future."

Race to the Top Has Supported Hard-working Educators in New Ways

Race to the Top has focused on providing better support and resources for America's most important leaders: teachers and principals. Under these grants, schools and districts are making sure we have excellent principals leading our schools and skilled teachers who inspire students. Through Race to the Top, grantees are developing new tools and resources, by promoting rigorous plans to develop, support, and evaluate teachers and principals, and by recognizing and rewarding their success. In addition, Race to the Top states also have been creative and thoughtful in developing strategies for recruiting and retaining great teachers and leaders who will ensure that states continue to make progress.

Thanks to new systems and collaboration, states have rolled out a number of new tools and opportunities for educators to use in their classrooms to create additional learning opportunities and tailor instruction to their students' unique needs. For example, in the 2012-2013 school year:

Ohio expanded alternative certification pathways for teachers and principals; developed 800 curriculum resources aligned to higher standards; and trained 24,000 teachers to use those resources.

Hawaii created and launched a STEM portal to provide resources and opportunities for collaboration to educators statewide, and assigned STEM resource teachers to serve as math and science mentors and provide training. It also has provided data coaches to provide feedback to school leaders and teachers.

Florida is investing in programs to get the best and brightest educators to the highest-needs areas. Programs from Florida Atlantic University and the University of South Florida recruit and train high-performing teachers and assistant principals to become assistant principals and principals. The goal is to prepare 160 new principals and assistant principals for employment in partner school districts as effective leaders. Through Race to the Top, the state also funds a school district that has joined forces with higher education officials to recruit minority students to become teachers.

Rhode Island had more than 400 first-year and 40 second-year teachers engage with the state's new teacher induction program, which includes weekly coaching and professional development.

Delaware launched the Delaware Talent Cooperative, which provides retention awards – between $2,500 and $10,000 over two years – to highly effective educators and leaders willing to work and stay in schools with the highest needs.

North Carolina created Home Base, a technology tool that will help educators manage professional resources and data to improve instruction, reducing the burden on school districts.

RACE TO THE TOP SNAPSHOT

More AP Participation — and Success

The Advanced Placement program is one way to ensure that more students gain access to challenging courses that prepare them to think, solve problems, write and master what the global job market demands.

PARTICIPATION RATES IN RACE TO THE TOP STATES

Students took
1.8 million
exams in 2013

13.2%
SINCE 2011

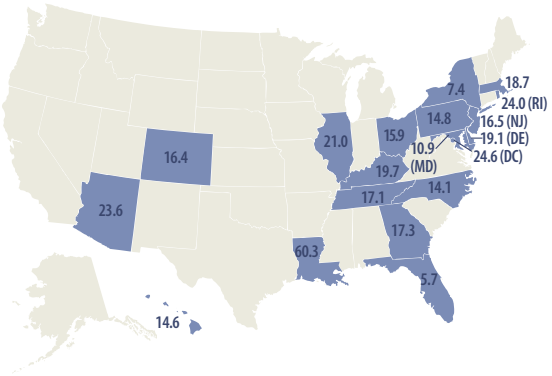
GAINS SINCE 2011

+13.5% Mathematics & Science **+65,008**

+13.5% English, History & Social Science **+135,532**

+9.6% Arts & World Languages **+10,571**

Participation in Louisiana rose **60.3%** since 2011, the biggest gain of any State.



QUALIFYING SCORES IN RACE TO THE TOP STATES

Students scored 3 or higher (qualifying for college credit) on
1.1 million
exams in 2013

15.5%
SINCE 2011

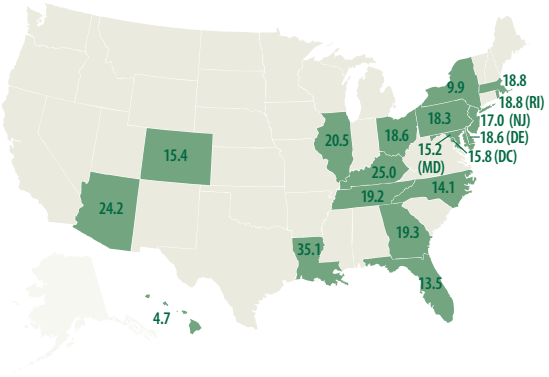
GAINS SINCE 2011

+23.1% Mathematics & Science **+65,237**

+11.3% English, History & Social Science **+66,448**

+18.1% Arts & World Languages **+13,205**

Qualifying scores in Louisiana rose **35.1%** since 2011, the biggest gain of any State.



Source: http://research.collegeboard.org/programs/ap/data

New York offers a growing set of materials, resources, and videos at EngageNY.org, which provides tools aligned to new, career- and college-ready standards and is available to educators, principals, parents, and students across the country. The site also includes parent and family resources to support their child's learning. For educators, the site includes training modules, webinars, and roadmaps for key decisions about local teacher and leader evaluation systems.

Tennessee Coaches 30,000 Educators to Support Transition to New Standards

In an ambitious and comprehensive effort, Tennessee provided 30,000 teachers with intensive summer training as part of its transition to the Common Core State Standards—more rigorous academic standards in English language arts and mathematics.

The sessions were led by 700 teacher coaches, known as "Core Coaches," who were selected from 1,250 applicants based on their record of classroom success and a round of interviews. Prior to leading the statewide training for their peers, the teacher-coaches received two weeks of intensive training from the state and experts in the standards.

The sessions and coaching were made possible by Tennessee's Race to the Top grant as the state identified the need for a more hands-on training approach to support educators in transitioning to the Common Core. The coaches have had significant positive effects on how teachers taught and how much students learned, according to a rigorous evaluation of the 2012 sessions by the State Department of Education. The quality of their questions, the feedback they gave to students and the instruction they gave in problem-solving techniques all improved, based on observer ratings. Student test scores also rose more quickly in participants' classrooms compared to those of non-participants, the evaluation found.

Though the summer sessions are over, many of the coaches are continuing to help their districts and fellow teachers with the transition to the new standards.

Continuing to Accelerate Progress for America's Students

The United States is in the midst of historic education reform, with a focus on results for all students. While there is a lot of work left to do, leading Race to the Top states demonstrate what is possible with the perseverance of America's educators and leaders.

Race to the Top was a catalyst for unleashing locally developed ideas and empowering state leaders to set their plans into action. Race to the Top has sparked dramatic changes in not only these grantees but in other states across the country – including those that did not receive a Race to the Top grant.

"Every teacher, every principal, every superintendent cites the professional learning communities as a core reason they have seen gains over the past three years."

*– **Christopher Ruszkowski**, chief officer of the Delaware Department of Education's Teacher and Leader Effectiveness Unit*

The progress seen in this flagship grant program for states has helped to spark other Obama Administration initiatives – also under the Race to the Top banner – which have sought to bring forth America's best ideas for improvement and transformation in education. These include: Race to the Top Assessment, which supports state consortia to design assessments aligned to new, higher standards; Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge, which promotes system-building around early learning opportunities; and Race to the Top-District, which supports local ideas about how to tailor learning to the needs of individual students.

All of these programs empower leaders outside of the federal government to take action to improve education in ways that make sense for their students. And the success of the Race to the Top family of programs so far has led to the Obama administration's fiscal year 2015 budget request for $300 million for Race to the Top-Equity and Opportunity. This proposed program would support states and districts in identifying and closing educational opportunity and achievement gaps and ensure that all students – particularly those with the highest needs – graduate from high school ready for college and careers.

Supporting States to Improve Assessment

In 2010, the Obama administration invested $350 million under Race to the Top to support two consortia of states that are developing a series of new, next-generation assessments aligned to college- and career-ready standards. These will serve as an important tool to move away from poor quality, fill-in-the-bubble assessments and avoid one-size-fits-all approaches. And in spring 2014, many states and school districts will try out these new assessments, which will better capture what our students know and what they're able to do.

State and local leaders will always know best what their students need and how to equip school principals, teachers and staff. These leaders have continued to show encouraging progress and inspiring determination to continuing this work – for years after the money will run out. Under Race to the Top, states have established a foundation for long-term success. While there have been – and will continue to be – bumps in the road, these states have shown a commitment to doing what's best for their kids and have stayed the course.

To support their work, for the first time, the U.S. Department of Education created a team that was charged with better partnering with states. Called the Implementation and Support Unit (ISU), this team works with state officials by providing support and feedback in a whole new way, recognizing the burdens that many states often face from the federal government, and the support states need in implementing these bold, new, and difficult reforms. The Department has also provided increased opportunities for collaboration among states, which is helpful for problem-solving similar challenges and learning from what other states have tried.

A recent report by the U.S. Government Accountability Office, an independent, nonpartisan agency that works for Congress, found that, overall, most states are happy with the new process the Department has been using and believe it is helpful in supporting their efforts. And in March 2014, the Thomas B. Fordham Institute noted that the credit for much of the progress under Race to the Top so far is thanks to this collaboration between the Department and state leadership.

The achievements that states have made under Race to the Top will provide benefits for years to come. Below are a few examples of the work underway for the remaining period of their grants:

Ohio will implement a performance-based funding policy to hold teacher preparation programs accountable for graduate success.

Tennessee is scaling up its Achievement School District, which supports the state's lowest-performing schools, and plans to include 35 schools by 2015.

The **District of Columbia** will launch the STEM Learning Network, which will provide tools to help educators to provide quality STEM learning experiences.

Encouraged and supported by Race to the Top, states are taking major steps forward for our nation's students. There will never be a moment to declare victory in this race – the work will continue for many years to come. But America's educators remain committed to support all our children on their path to a prosperous future. State and local leaders share that commitment. Staying on course is critical while this hard work is underway.