



# Race to the Top Executive Summary

December 2015

## **Executive Summary: The District of Columbia’s Race to the Top Grant**

In 2010, the District of Columbia became one of only 19 states across the nation to be awarded a Race to the Top (RTTT) grant. The District’s proposal for the grant represented an opportunity to build upon existing reforms and incorporated many innovative approaches designed by the District’s largest local education agency, the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS), and its vast network of charter schools. While the District of Columbia had seen clear progress in student achievement prior to receiving the grant, the RTTT grant award helped the city to take the next steps necessary to accelerate this student achievement, improve the quality of the teacher workforce, and ensure that every child graduates from a District of Columbia school ready for postsecondary education or the workforce.

This Executive Summary provides an overview of the District’s progress under the RTTT grant and the many ways the RTTT investments have paid off for students, educators, and the District’s educational system as a whole.

### **Progress in Improving Student Outcomes**

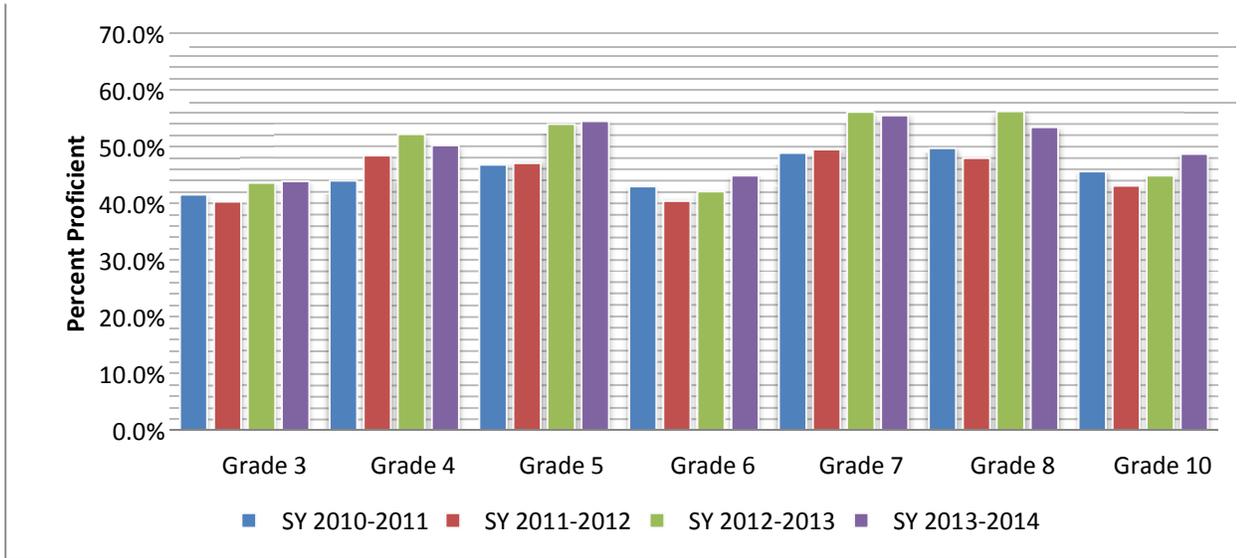
In its original RTTT application, DC set forward ambitious student achievement goals for the four-year grant period. Since 2010, DC has seen impressive gains in student achievement in several of these areas, demonstrating the success of educators and school leaders in embracing the innovative reforms of RTTT. Highlights of DC’s progress include:

#### *Increased proficiency rates: DC CAS performance*

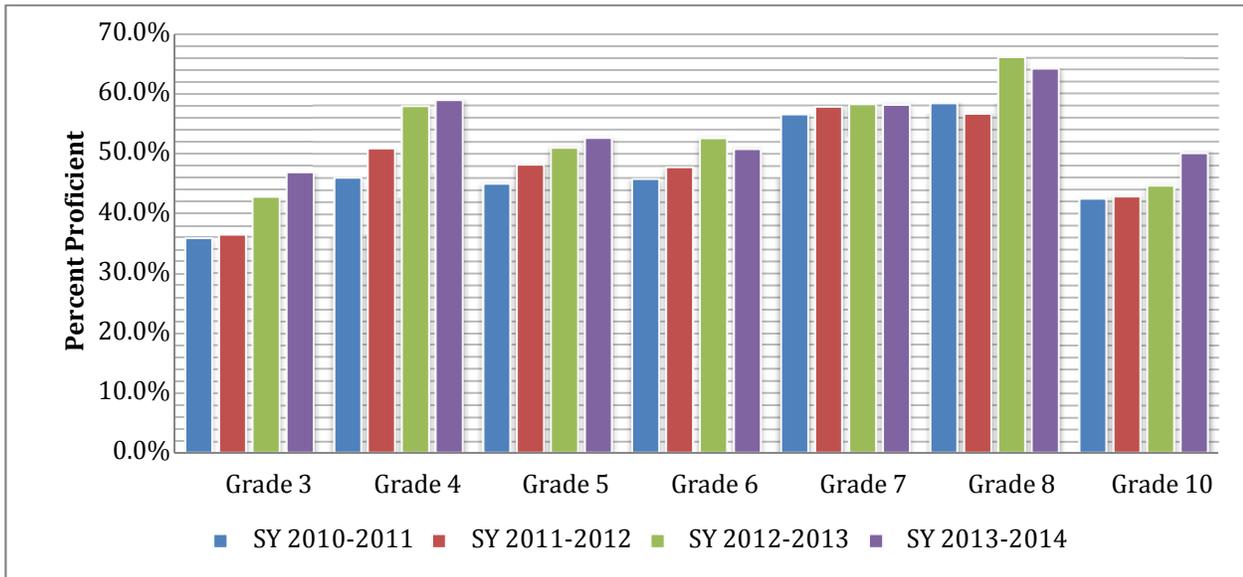
Since the RTTT grant began, student proficiency has increased across grade levels in both English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics on DC’s state assessment, the DC CAS. Just as importantly, most grades have demonstrated consistent growth throughout the four years.

For ELA, the largest gains were seen in the third, fourth, and fifth grades. For math, the most significant gains were seen in the third, fourth, and tenth grades, where double digit gains were achieved.

**Figure 1: DC CAS English Language Arts (ELA): Student Proficiency**



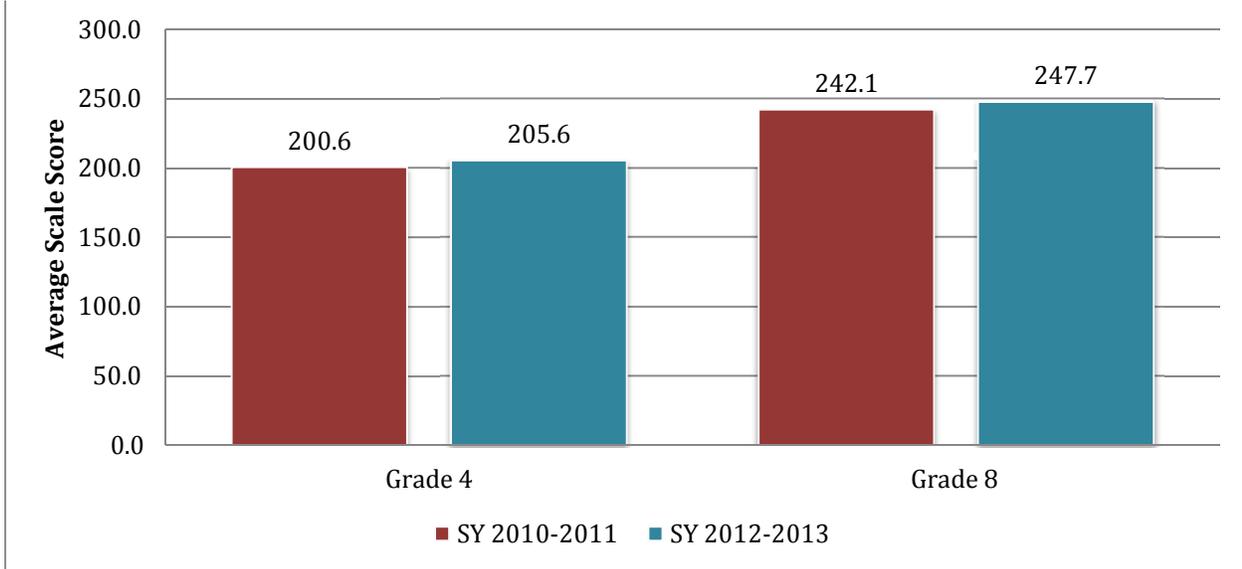
**Figure 2: DC CAS Math: Student Proficiency**



*Increased proficiency rates: NAEP Performance*

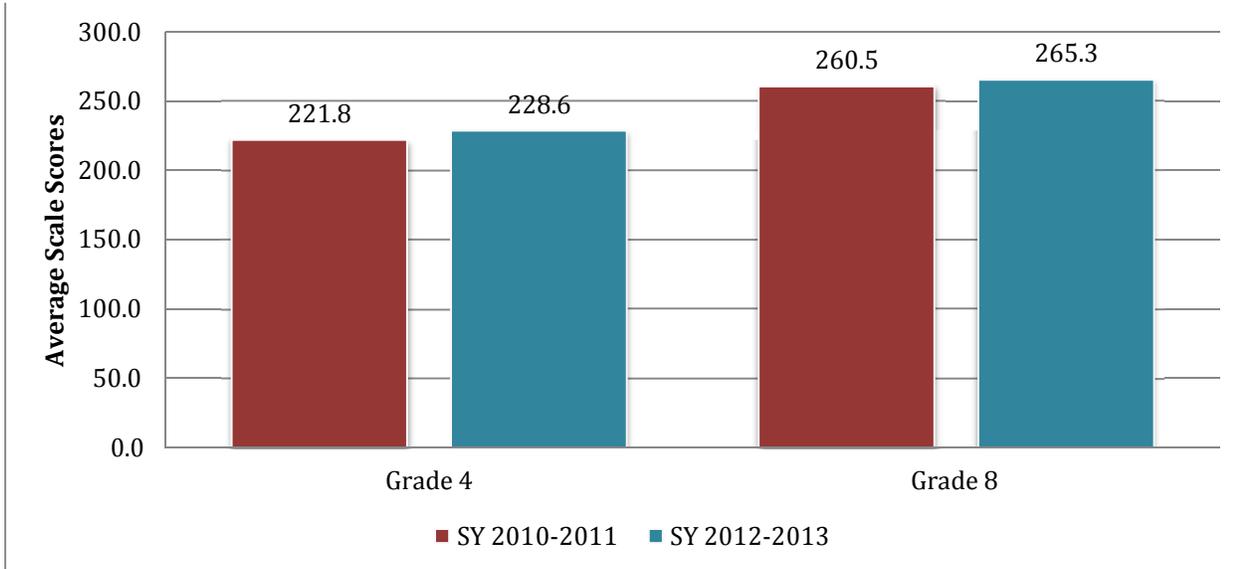
The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is administered nationally every two years to fourth and eighth graders. DC’s students made statistically significant gains on the exam from 2011 to 2013. These gains reflect some of the highest in the nation and DC is one of only a few states in which student performance grew at both grade levels and in both subjects.

**Figure 3: NAEP Reading: Student Proficiency**



The scaled scores above translate into an increase in reading proficiency rates from 18.8 to 23.0 percent for fourth grade and from 16.1 to 17.4 percent for eighth grade.

**Figure 4: NAEP Math: Student Proficiency**

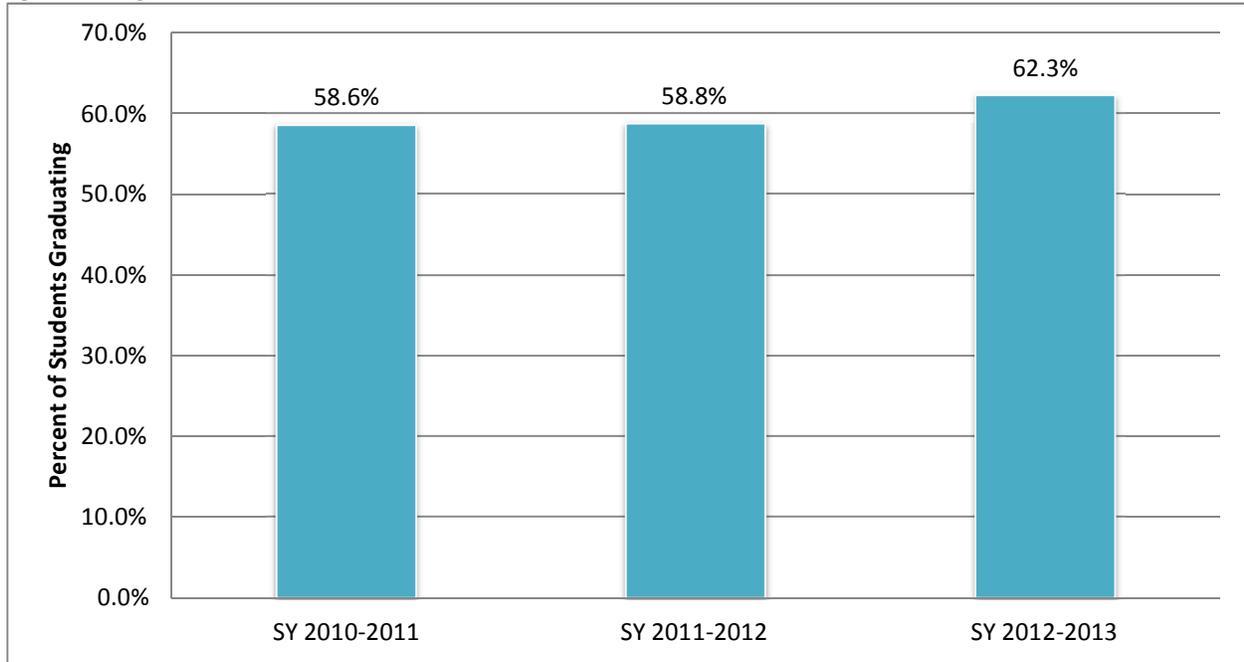


The scaled scores above translate into an increase in math proficiency rates from 21.6 to 27.9 percent for fourth grade and from 17.0 to 18.8 percent for eighth grade.

*Increased high school graduation rates*

The District has also demonstrated notable growth in high school graduation rates, from 58.6 percent in 2011 to 62.3 percent in 2013.

**Figure 5:** High School Graduation Rates over Time



The RTTT grant has allowed DC’s education community an unprecedented opportunity to make deep investments in critical areas of educational reform. The summary below provides an overview of key accomplishments achieved under the grant, followed by an overview of challenges, lessons learned and future plans.

**Investment Area: Building Strong Statewide Capacity to Implement and Scale Up Proposed Reforms**

At the time of its original RTTT application, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) had recently been created as the state education agency. As part of the development of the RTTT application, DC’s leaders recognized a clear need to strengthen the agency’s capacity to carry out the ambitious reforms identified in its application.

*The Enterprise Grants Management System (EGMS)*

Agency leaders were especially committed to improving the grants management process, not only to meet federal requirements but also to better support the local education agencies (LEAs) and the important work they do. To meet this need, RTTT funds were used to develop and implement a new grants management system that would allow for improved coordination of all grant funds flowing from OSSE.

This grants management system—called the Enterprise Grants Management System (EGMS)—was designed to improve the OSSE’s administration and management of federal and local grants. The system is also a tool that provides users information on the status of project applications and funding awards.

OSSE began developing its grants management system in 2012-2013 and the system is now fully operational.

With EGMS, OSSE is able to automate the entire grant life-cycle process, from pre-application to close-out, while consolidating the multitude of databases previously used to manage grants into a single centralized system. This streamlined grant processing system translates into higher-quality customer service for users and the more efficient use of local and federal education dollars.

### *Stakeholder Engagement*

Another identified area of need related to OSSE's capacity to implement RTTT reforms is related to stakeholder engagement. Stakeholders from the local education community proved essential in the development of the city's RTTT reform plans. Stakeholders included representatives from DCPS, the Public Charter School Board (PCSB), community groups, legislators, and others. In order to fully achieve the ambitious reforms laid out in the original RTTT application, such engagement would need to continue and be structured in a meaningful manner throughout the grant period.

Further reflecting DC's vision for more robust stakeholder engagement and the agency's goal to raise LEA collaboration to a new level, OSSE convened a number of taskforces focusing on key issues connected to the RTTT assurance areas:

**Student Growth Measure Taskforce** – This taskforce supported the development of new assessments to measure student growth in priority grades and subject areas. In year four of the grant, this taskforce and the Human Capital Taskforce (described below) were combined. The reconstituted taskforce met monthly during the year. It focused on providing OSSE guidance and vetting resources and training materials on student learning objectives (SLOs).

**Human Capital Taskforce** – This taskforce advised OSSE on teacher and leader evaluation guidelines, reviewed teacher and leader evaluation plans from LEAs, and advised OSSE on its competitive grants focused on strengthening human capital.

**Teacher Preparation Programs Taskforce** – This taskforce provided expertise on teacher preparation programs and provided OSSE feedback on related initiatives.

**Common Core State Standards (CCSS) Taskforce** – This taskforce supported CCSS implementation (e.g., developing materials to support writing instruction) and best practice sharing among all participating RTTT LEAs. In year three through year four of the grant, the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) Educator Leader Cadre replaced this taskforce and met monthly to discuss preparation and transition to the PARCC assessment.

**State Science Leadership Team** – This taskforce was developed during the fall of 2013 and focuses on providing feedback related to the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). It also garners community support for NGSS and STEM initiatives.

## **Investment Area: Supporting the Transition to College- and Career Ready Standards and Aligned Assessments**

DC was a forerunner in CCSS adoption when the RTTT grant was awarded in 2010. Since that time, the grant has allowed our schools to accelerate the implementation of these standards in every classroom across the District. Soon after the RTTT grant was awarded, a crosswalk of the newly adopted standards and the previous DC standards was developed and made available to LEAs. At the same time, DC's statewide ELA and math assessments, the DC CAS, were being aligned to the CCSS standards. The ELA assessment, including composition, was aligned in 2011 and administered in 2012; the math assessment was aligned in 2012 and administered in 2013. With guidance from OSSE, RTTT LEAs also developed CCSS implementation plans and began to adopt or create CCSS-aligned interim assessments.

Over the course of the grant period, OSSE delivered CCSS trainings to LEAs highlighting research-based expert educational practices. OSSE also created an interactive "CCSS Lesson Generator" tool with CCSS deconstructed standards aligned with principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to better support educator practice.

OSSE also partnered with American University in Washington, DC and 40 District educators to collaboratively develop standards-based lesson plans that would support educators who serve students with disabilities, English language learners, and students in the disciplines of science, engineering, technology and math (STEM). The participants met for over 40 hours to learn how to effectively provide instruction to secondary students and to develop standards-based lesson plans to be shared with educators via the DC Lesson Plan Generator.

LEAs have worked hard to fully implement the standards in their classrooms by using RTTT funds for professional development and to provide dedicated time for educators to collaborate and plan their instructional practice. LEAs have also worked to incorporate high-quality, CCSS-aligned interim assessments in both reading and math in order to better understand and monitor student progress.

RTTT grant funds have also been used to support the needs of special populations students through the provision of National Center and State Collaborative (NCSC) resources and trainings based on the CCSS. DC educators of students with significant cognitive disabilities received these consortium resources both in print and online. In-person trainings focused on (a) NCSC schema, (b) UDL, (c) goal writing for individual education programs (IEPs), and (d) strategies for teaching and assessing challenging academic content for students with significant cognitive disabilities.

Furthermore, DC's statewide special education data system (SEDS) has been upgraded to align with the CCSS. SEDS now contains drop-down menus listing the standards to inform IEP writers. This functionality allows educators to use the database not only to track compliance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, but also to develop and monitor IEP goals aligned with the standards.

As part of its commitments under RTTT, the office of the Deputy Mayor of Education (DME) convened a P-20 consortium of internal and external stakeholders called "RaiseDC." RaiseDC helped align high school curricula and graduation requirements with college entrance requirements. RaiseDC also worked

to increase the quantity, quality, and coordination of the use of DC's educational data and to develop networks for specific lines of work (e.g., pre-kindergarten preparation, after-school programming, college and career). In spring 2013, the DME identified the Community Foundation of the National Capital Region as the lead fiscal agent and manager of the consortium's activities. The initiative has worked to develop a set of cross-agency indicators to assess progress towards DC's educational goals and to develop statewide reports on progress.

Using data provided by OSSE, the DME has proposed changes to the District's high school graduation requirements. In addition, a taskforce has been convened to focus on graduation pathways through and beyond high school. The group has worked to define where students were falling off track between middle school and college completion.

### **Investment Area: Expand Capacity and Systems for Data Access**

In its original application, OSSE planned to use RTTT funds to create a user-friendly website, which would provide parents and community members with comprehensive, school-level data. LearnDC.org would serve as a repository, housing all student and education-related data, and as a tool used to inform planning, management, and evaluation decisions.

Development of this online repository—called the Statewide Longitudinal Education Data (SLED) system— began in 2011. SLED houses extensive educational data, including assessment and enrollment data. This data is captured to track academic progress from when a student first enters childcare through secondary education. It also contains postsecondary outcome data such as (a) data on college retention rates, (b) college persistence rates, (c) the professional certifications of graduates, and (d) employment/wages. SLED also includes Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) compliant aggregate spreadsheets and interactive visuals of research-ready data sets, including a data set with state assessment results by sub- group since 2007.

LearnDC.org serves as the public-facing website for the SLED system. On LearnDC, SLED powers the creation of LEA- and school-level report cards and school profiles. Users are able to conduct a drilldown analysis on a wide variety of indicators including (a) student proficiency rates, (b) attendance rates and (c) school growth percentiles. LearnDC also serves as a hub for other educational resources, including resources on the CCSS, teacher and leader evaluation systems, the PARCC assessment, early childhood and child care programs.

In addition to training each LEA on the LearnDC site and its user functions, OSSE led an extensive outreach campaign on the website by providing trainings and sharing information with the DC council, parent groups and neighborhood community groups across the District. LearnDC was recently held up as an example of best practice in state data reporting from longitudinal data systems by the Data Quality Campaign and identified as one of three top "report card" websites by the Education Commission of the States.

To increase DC's engagement with researchers and external stakeholders around data, OSSE developed an online form for organizations to apply for student-level and cohort-level data. OSSE has also signed memoranda of understandings with 70 research and university partners for this purpose. Finally, OSSE has developed data-sharing partnerships with many of DC's local college access providers with the goal of ultimately improving college graduation rates for District residents.

**Investment Area: Develop Instructional Improvement Systems Aligned to Data Systems**

As part of their RTTT commitments, all participating LEAs agreed to implement an instructional improvement system (IIS) by fall 2012. This was an important commitment as, at the time of DC's original RTTT application, DC's LEAs had varying levels of access and use of such systems. Effective instructional improvement systems perform two functions. First, they provide teachers with actionable data to inform real-time decisions. Second, they provide support for teachers to use that data to inform instruction. At the time of the application, DCPS used a sophisticated series of interconnected data improvement systems to support this work; however, many of the charter LEAs had disparate data systems that lacked interconnectedness. Consequently, DC's strategy was two-pronged. First, the grant would fund instructional improvement systems in all participating charter LEAs. Second, the grant would help DCPS expand its existing IMPACT evaluation system, ensuring that DCPS teachers could be strategic with their own improvement efforts.

Over the course of the grant period, all participating LEAs implemented an IIS and identified an in-school Data Coach or Data Lead to support the use of data in classrooms. Some schools chose to use outside vendors to serve in the data lead capacity, while others placed the responsibility with internal staff. Data Leads/Coaches played a pivotal role in helping schools use their IIS to analyze data to inform instructional programs, lead meetings to review data, and provide professional development on using data.

To meet the needs of charter LEAs in particular, the RTTT grant funded four IIS competitive subgrants. These subgrants were used to help charter LEAs develop IIS's with the support of a technology vendor and in collaboration with one another in a consortia format. Each consortium was structured with a lead LEA and at least three partner LEAs. Over the course of the grant period, the four consortia worked to add modules to their systems, including attendance, behavior, grade books, and interim assessment results. In addition to building the systems, the technology partner within each consortia provided ongoing technical assistance and professional development to consortia members on the use of their systems. The work of the IIS consortia has played a pivotal role in helping many LEAs—especially smaller ones with limited capacity—to develop robust data systems and has further strengthened the connection between data and instruction. LEAs report that they will continue their work with the IIS moving forward.

Over the course of the grant period OSSE has regularly offered professional development on data-driven instruction via the agency's Core Professional Development Calendar. The agency's data and specialized education divisions have regularly collaborated to deliver professional development to the field. In addition, each year OSSE co-hosts the DC Data Summit with Friends of Choice in Urban Schools, a local charter school advocacy group.

**Investment Area: Improving Teacher and Principal Effectiveness Based on Performance**

DC advanced a number of activities to provide LEAs with the tools and supports necessary to implement systems for evaluating teachers and principals. These tools and supports included (a) the development of a common growth measure in grades 4-8, (b) the expansion of growth measures to non-tested grades and subjects, (c) the provision of standards to LEAs to ensure that teacher and principal

evaluation systems meet established criteria, and (d) the convening of stakeholders across sectors to support best practices in human capital management.

### *School and Student Growth Models*

RTTT helped fund two growth models across the District: a variation of the median growth percentile used to measure schoolwide growth and an individual teacher value added model required for math and ELA teachers in grades 4-8 (optional for teachers in grades 3, 9, and 10). The schoolwide growth model is used in the Public Charter School Board's annual Performance Management Framework and DCPS' annual School Scorecard—two critical measures of school accountability. OSSE also provided individual student data to every LEA for tested grades.

All RTTT LEAs committed to use individual value added data for teachers in grades 4-8 as part of a teacher's final evaluation rating. In addition to providing each RTTT LEA with individual value added data, OSSE also conducted the roster confirmation process, ensuring that teachers were accurately linked to the students they taught and for the correct proportion of instructional time. The roster confirmation process helped ensure value added results were accurate.

OSSE also provided a variety of training sessions and a technical support committee comprised of LEA stakeholders to ensure that the value added model was implemented fairly, reliably, and with fidelity. The committee convened regularly throughout the first three years of RTTT to advise on the implementation and any adjustments of the value added model.

### *Expanded Growth Measures*

During the 2011-2012 school year, each RTTT LEA also committed to pilot an assessment or growth measure in a non-DC CAS grade or subject and then use that measure in school year 2012-2013 evaluations. To support LEAs' incorporation of new assessments, RTTT funds were used to launch the Expanded Growth Assessments competitive grants as a way to help LEAs develop or incorporate new assessments or growth measures into LEA evaluations. Two grants were awarded—one to fund the Northwest Education Association Measure of Academic Progress assessments across a consortium of LEAs and the other to fund the development of a 6-8 grade social studies assessment within DCPS.

### *Student Learning Objectives*

To further support LEAs' work in this area, during year 3 of the RTTT grant, OSSE amended its original application to add support for Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) – a goal setting and monitoring process used to measure student growth within educator evaluation systems. The purpose of the SLO project was to provide professional development, using the “train the trainer” model, to school leadership teams who opted to use SLOs in their evaluation systems, in addition to providing support to school based staff on the ground during the implementation stage. These systems of support were intended to build SLO awareness and knowledge, expertise, fluency across LEAs, and guidance for developing student achievement measures to track teacher effectiveness.

In partnership with the Human Capital Taskforce (HCT), OSSE created a guidebook and piloted a training series as a resource for educators in the development of SLOs. The training series called

“Semester of SLOs,” was designed to build educators’ and school leaders’ capacity around the overall SLO process and covered topics such as conducting needs assessments and developing SLO systems implementation action plans. At the conclusion of the year, OSSE collaborated with the Community Training and Assistance Center to provide a four-day SLO Intensive to LEA teachers and instructional leaders. LEAs received further support building capacity with tailored feedback from national experts.

### *Teacher and Leader Evaluation Systems*

At the beginning of the grant period, OSSE worked with the HCT to create teacher and leader evaluation guidelines for participating LEAs. LEAs, in turn, worked to implement their evaluation systems to inform significant human capital decisions including compensation, promotion, retention and removal. As a result of this work under RTTT, participating LEAs now have systematic, rigorous methodologies that both inform instructional conversations based on student performance and ensure data-driven human capital strategies. Based off teacher effectiveness ratings and retention data, LEAs have reported increased retention of highly effective teachers, improved teaching practice across the board, and higher performing teachers replacing teachers who have exited the system as direct impacts of the RTTT investments. It is important to note that reported increases in teacher effectiveness have correlated with student achievement gains over the course of the grant period.

OSSE also partnered with one lead charter school LEA and 13 other LEAs to launch the DC Model Teacher Evaluation System in November 2014. The goal of the system is to help LEAs use teacher evaluation systems as robust sources of information and tools for their improvement. Over the course of the year, LEAs worked to create customized implementation plans and receive training on leading effective teacher observations and developing student learning objectives. The pilot was fully launched in the summer of 2015 with six LEAs participating.

### **Investment Area: Improving the Effectiveness of Teacher and Principal Preparation Programs**

To further support the development of a strong human capital system, the District set out to create a pipeline of highly effective teachers by facilitating partnerships between LEAs and non-traditional educator preparation providers. Three Charter School Teacher Pipelines grants funded by RTTT were awarded to support the development of teacher residency programs. These programs used comprehensive recruitment and selection processes to identify and place highly effective teachers in hard-to-staff areas, such as early childhood, math, and science. Within the programs, teacher residents received a full year of job-embedded professional development and mentoring before being placed as a full-time classroom teacher in a high-need area. Each LEA was required to partner with an expert organization to provide professional development and mentor support to the teaching residents.

These programs trained and placed 137 teacher residents within District LEAs. Residents were trained in the high-needs subjects of early childhood education (50 residents), STEM (16 residents), and SPED/ELL (19 residents). When programs were selected, competitive preference points were given to programs which prepared teachers in these high-needs subject areas. Each program reported high levels of satisfaction amongst residents, high performance scores, high principal satisfaction, and strong retention percentages. The partnerships between the LEAs and teacher preparation providers have continued after the end of the grant. In fact, one lead LEA, KIPP DC, was awarded a 10 million dollar RTTT District grant to increase the scale of its program.

**Investment Area: Providing Effective Support to Teachers and Principals**

To further the grant's efforts to strengthen teacher effectiveness, DC created custom professional development experiences while also leveraging existing pockets of effectiveness within the District.

The Educator Portal+ website offers teachers access to professional development resources related to the CCSS, aligned interim assessments, and effective teaching strategies. The portal was developed by DCPS and serves as a one-stop shop for a range of resources including self-assessments on each component of the teacher evaluation system, student data, re-teach plans, streamed videos of teacher practice in action, online modules via LearnZillion, and customizable weekly digests and announcements. District charters also use the portal to access resources on common core implementation.

The Professional Learning Communities for Effectiveness grant (PLaCEs) was designed as a collaborative anchored by high-achieving schools as a means to engage educators in professional development and adult learning experiences that would positively affect student outcomes. OSSE awarded grants to two charter LEAs focused on developing school leaders through site-based coaching, providing Common Core- aligned professional development, providing training to special education teachers to support students in accessing the CCSS, and developing a resource portal of high-quality unit plans, lessons, and other materials that are aligned to the CCSS. For example, one of the charter LEAs created over 350 CCSS video resources which are posted online. Additionally, the second charter developed 20 CCCS ELA resources for teachers. Over the course of the grant, the LEAs reached over 15,500 students through 191 participating educators across 35 charter and DCPS schools.

OSSE also developed Data Communities of Practice (CoPs) in partnership with the RaiseDC organization. These CoPs awarded "Data Spotlight Awards" which highlighted LEAs that use education data in innovative and impactful ways to address the challenges District youth face. Ten mini-grants were awarded to highlight and help scale innovative data tools, professional development, and data-focused instructional applications created by DC's educators.

**Investment Area: Strengthening STEM Learning throughout the District**

Through the RTTT grant and with the help of community partners, DC has designed a statewide STEM strategy that leverages local and national partnerships and expertise with rigorous standards and engaging professional development opportunities. In 2013, DC adopted the Next Generation Science Standards. These ground-breaking standards are clear while being rich in content and practice. OSSE has provided a range of trainings on the standards since their adoption.

In addition, OSSE, in partnership with its stakeholders, has released and began implementation of a STEM strategic plan for the District. This plan sets forward a coherent vision for STEM by focusing on the following strategies:

- 1) PK-16 STEM Education Pathways: Equitable pathways to support STEM awareness, interest, engagement, and achievement from Pre-K through postsecondary
- 2) Systems of Support: Coordinated system of support to actualize a cohesive vision for PK-16 STEM education that promotes equitable access to STEM-rich opportunities for DC students and families
- 3) STEM Workforce Development: Strategies aligned to address the demand for a highly skilled STEM

workforce and to create equitable opportunities for students to engage in career pathways

- 4) STEM Community Engagement and Outreach: Coordinated systems of support to promote city-wide engagement and awareness of STEM education initiatives and opportunities

OSSE has also worked to launch the DC STEM Learning Network—a forum for program guidance, development and best-practice sharing across stakeholder groups. The network provides a space for collaboration, direction, and support for the development of STEM-focused policies and partnerships. To lead the Network, OSSE has signed a memorandum of agreement with the Carnegie Institute to serve as its lead organization. Over the coming years, the Network will continue to lead the work to identify and cultivate resources that educators and external stakeholders need to implement quality STEM learning experiences across the District.

### **Investment Area: Turning Around the Lowest Performing Schools**

Building off lessons learned from past school turnaround efforts, DC used RTTT funds to accelerate improvement in some of its most challenged schools through the provision of increased resources and support. Due to planning delays and staffing challenges, DC's turnaround efforts under this grant were delayed through years 1-3. However, in year 4 OSSE and its partner LEA, DCPS, worked aggressively to course-correct implementation and strengthen their support to identified schools. Through this collaboration, eight DCPS schools identified as Priority schools under DC's waiver to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act began the implementation of two turnaround models: the Blended Learning model for elementary and middle schools and the Twilight Academy model for high schools.

Blended Learning models enable teachers to leverage technology to create a learning environment where students have daily opportunities to individualize their learning experiences and control the amount of time they spend working in a blended learning space. The goal of this model is to ensure that students are able to spend more time on tasks with instructional content that directly meets their instructional needs.

The Twilight Academy model aims to fulfill the needs of students who require a non-traditional learning environment, specifically over-aged and under-credited high school students who are two or more grade levels behind. The Twilight Academy model is a small learning community typically held after school hours, which provides an opportunity for students to rapidly accumulate credits through an alternative school setting and course programming to get back on track for graduation.

In order to support the implementation of these models, DCPS provided direct support to schools via its Office of School Turnaround and via external vendors with expertise in the models. These groups provided participating educators and school leaders with professional development and targeted technical assistance to educators as they implemented the model over the course of the year.

Student outcomes from the Twilight program were strong. Participating schools reported increased attendance, decreased student suspensions, and increased credit-earning rates for participating students. Student outcomes for students attending Blended Learning schools are expected to be available in summer 2015. Moving forward, these models will be sustained in these schools and, in some cases, further expanded.

### **Investment Area: DC's Statewide System of Support**

In the 2014-2015 year, OSSE targeted RTTT funds to expand its Statewide System of Support. Within this system, OSSE sought to provide targeted, data-driven supports to LEAs based while also fostering collaboration amongst LEA and school leaders. Key elements of the system included LEA Institutes, best practices dissemination grants, and interventions for DC's lowest performing schools.

OSSE held three LEA Institutes that provided training and ongoing support to all LEAs/schools in DC based on identified needs. The three Institutes focused on the following topics: 1) connecting LEAs to City agencies that provide wraparound supports to students and their families; 2) preparing educators for next generation assessments; and 3) best practice sharing across LEAs. The Institutes were well attended and highly regarded by participants.

OSSE also implemented a competitive grant program that supported the active dissemination of best practices across schools around shared areas of work. Within this grant program, OSSE funded five lead LEAs that partnered with struggling schools. Schools worked jointly to implement professional development and other capacity building activities for educators.

Finally, OSSE implemented the Learning Support Network—the agency's intervention for Priority and Focus schools as identified by DC's Flexibility Waiver to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Within the Network, OSSE provided schools with on-site coaching, job-alike collaboration with colleagues, and a "line of credit," a limited amount of funds to support identified reform efforts that the coaches supported. With Network support, schools worked to strengthen their Response to Intervention (RtI) models, provide increased college and career exposure activities for students, and strengthen the capacity of school leadership teams.

### **Challenges and Lessons Learned**

Over the course of implementing the RTTT grant, OSSE, its participating LEAs and other external stakeholders confronted a number of implementation challenges that, in some cases, delayed successful implementation of some reforms or necessitated mid-course corrections along the way. While each project experienced its specific challenges, some common themes and lessons learned from across the RTTT projects include:

- 1) Human capital is critical to the effective implementation of education reform at the school, LEA, and state levels. To ensure continuity of reform work, specific strategies must be in place to address staff turnover and leadership changes.*

Like most educational agencies, over the course of the grant period, OSSE and its participating LEAs have periodically experienced the turnover of staff that were leading elements of RTTT reforms. As a result, some projects were put on hold until new leadership was identified or the projects required a shift in approach in order to be carried out effectively. While such turnover cannot be completely avoided, educational agencies should take care to ensure that their reforms are sustainable beyond the work of one individual. As a result, OSSE has addressed this challenge through (a) the use of regular reporting mechanisms that can chronicle the progress of implementing a project (e.g., monthly progress reports, quarterly check-in calls); (b) employing the regular practice

of taking and disseminating notes during and after meetings; and (c) the development of project teams to carry out work collaboratively, thus limiting the dependence on one individual alone.

- 2) *LEAs must have the time and capacity to focus on effective implementation in order to be successful.*

The RTTT grant brought about a new opportunity for DC’s educators and school leaders to receive support and resources around several areas of educational reform. While all RTTT LEAs agreed to the aims of the grant, many—especially smaller LEAs with limited capacity—found it challenging to carry out all of the reforms of RTTT simultaneously with a high level of quality. As a result, OSSE proposes that for future grant opportunities, consideration should be paid to possibly sequencing the implementation of key reforms to ensure that schools are able to build the internal expertise and capacity to carry out the work well.

- 3) *Stakeholder engagement must be a foundational element of any reform effort. Without it, there is a risk of missing the mark on an initiative and losing the opportunity to make a major impact.*

When done well, stakeholder engagement can expand the reach of an initiative and ensure its success. Such engagement must include a variety of communication mechanisms that reach multiple audiences via print, online, and in-person forums. There is no doubt—the RTTT reforms that effectively engaged external stakeholders and regularly used their feedback to improve implementation were met with more success. As we move beyond the grant period, such reforms are better positioned to be sustained for the long term.

- 4) *Operational challenges can impede the rapid implementation of reforms.*

In order to carry out the ambitious reforms of RTTT within a relatively short amount of time, OSSE and many of its LEAs engaged third-party vendors to carry out specific work aligned with their areas of expertise. Though this approach to implementation was typically more efficient and cost-effective than hiring staff internally, the procurement processes to bring on such expertise was often complicated and contributed to implementation delays in some cases. Moving forward, it would be beneficial for city leaders to consider ways the procurement process can be streamlined to ensure that time and resources are being maximized during a time-limited grant period.

### **Moving Forward After RTTT**

RTTT has enabled DC to make lasting investments in educational achievement for the long term. Moving forward, educators and school leaders will continue to benefit from resources, professional development and support from RTTT LEAs in the critical reform areas. The District, LEAs and OSSE continue to identify alternative means of continuing the grant’s momentum, through either the reallocation of local, federal or private funds or the development of new partnerships to sustain the work.