# California's Race to the Top
# A Road Map for Round Two

Delaware and Tennessee were the only states to win Round One of the Race to the Top (RTTT) competition, thanks to their bold and innovative education-reform plans and a keen focus on improving student outcomes. These two states, as well as the 14 others chosen as finalists in the competition, have blazed a path for the rest of the nation.

Although California's size, diversity, and financial situation do set it apart, its uniqueness does not mean the state has nothing to learn from the promising reform plans submitted by other states.

This "Road Map for Round Two" of the RTTT competition analyzes why California lost, how other states did better, and what California can and should do differently to win in the second round. The clock is running down; the stakes are high. The state should swiftly move to take advantage of opportunities to get back in the game.

## WHY CALIFORNIA LOST

The Race to the Top competition uses a 500-point grading scale that scores state applications on a variety of elements ranging from standards to data systems, teachers and leaders, and school turnarounds. California received 337 points, which equates to 67 percent (a D+), because the state failed to propose reforms bold enough to improve student outcomes and narrow devastating achievement gaps. Once again, California put adult interests ahead of what is best for students.

| Race to the Top Assurance | California Points Earned | RTTT Points Possible | Point Gap |
|---|---|---|---|
| State Success Factors | 74 | 125 | 51 |
| Standards and Assessments | 65 | 70 | 5 |
| Data Systems | 17 | 47 | 30 |
| Great Teachers and Leaders | 100 | 138 | 38 |
| Turning Around Low-Achieving Schools | 41 | 50 | 9 |
| General | 40 | 55 | 15 |
| STEM Emphasis | 0 | 15 | 15 |
| *Total* | *337* | *500* | *163* |

The state's proposal was docked multiple points because it lacked specific, substantive, bold reforms with aggressive timelines and the commitment from local educators to implement the reforms. In some parts of the application, California simply can't and shouldn't attempt to pick up lost points. But in other areas, California has an opportunity to make up the ground it needs to send a competitive application to Washington, D.C.

First, it is important to understand how points were awarded. Each state's RTTT application was reviewed by five peer reviewers. Their scoring of Race to the Top applications can be distilled into three broad categories: status-related points, commitment-related points, and reform-plan-related points:

- **Status-related points** were awarded for what states had already accomplished. Is there a statewide data system in place? Has the achievement gap narrowed? Is education funding a priority? Overwhelmingly, the answer to these questions in California is No, and for that reason, the state lost points.

- **Commitment-related points** were awarded for the commitment of school districts and union leaders to participate in the proposed reform plan. Whereas other states—even those with strong unions—were able to secure to the commitment of all or most school districts and local teacher unions, California's commitment

consisted of 46 percent of school districts and just 26 percent of the union leaders from those districts.

- **Reform-plan-related points** were awarded based on a state's proposals for education reform. RTTT reviewers looked for unambiguous and concrete plans for reform with specific timelines, feasible implementation plans, and strong accountability systems. Although many of the core ideas proposed in California's application were lauded by reviewers, the state's application lost points for lack of clarity, feasibility, or concrete implementation strategies.

| California's RTTT Application, Round One | California Points Earned | RTTT Points Possible | Point Gap |
|---|---|---|---|
| Status-related | 103 | 154 | **51** |
| Commitment-related | 37 | 70 | **33** |
| Reform-plan-related | 197 | 276 | **79** |
| *Total* | *337* | *500* | *163* |

Looking forward, California has little chance of making up the 51 points it lost on status-related items, particularly for its longstanding failure to significantly narrow achievement gaps, the underfunding of public schools, and the state's still incomplete longitudinal data system.

In some cases, California's loss of status-related points affected its reform-related points as well. For example, reviewers docked ten points from the state's reform plan for not ensuring equitable distribution of effective teachers, since the state has neither a definition for teacher effectiveness nor a functional statewide data system in place to measure it.

Given these deficits, California state leaders must be even bolder and more innovative in proposing second-round reform strategies that can garner the commitment-related and reform-related points needed to catch up with other states. For potential ideas, this report looks at the successful elements of other states' applications, particularly Delaware's and Tennessee's.

Knowing that those two states differ widely from California, this report will also look to three finalist states that more closely mirror California's size and diversity—Florida, New York, and Illinois—to learn from their more successful plans. The report will then identify areas of California's application where state leaders can build on the proposals of the other states in order to gain the most points in Round Two.

| Race to the Top, Round One | Student Enrollment | RTTT Points | RTTT Place |
|---|---|---|---|
| Delaware | 122,574 | 455 | **1** |
| Tennessee | 964,259 | 444 | **2** |
| Florida | 2,666,811 | 431 | **4** |
| Illinois | 2,112,805 | 424 | **5** |
| New York | 2,765,435 | 409 | **15** |
| California | 6,343,471 | 337 | **27** |

Source: Common Core of Data, 2007-08, State Enrollment

## WHAT OTHER STATES DID BETTER

The 16 finalist states submitted Race to the Top applications with concrete, substantive, and detailed reform plans to improve student outcomes. Many of these applications received points for setting rapid timelines and agreeing to implement changes immediately.

Other applications were honest about the challenges they faced and designed realistic strategies to overcome them and improve student outcomes. Here are examples of promising ideas California can and should use as models for its application.

### State Success Factors

States were recognized for their track record on education reform and for articulating ambitious but attainable goals for student achievement. States won praise for a candid evaluation of the challenges they were likely to face in meeting those goals. Reviewers checked how many districts, unions, and other organizations signed on to support the state's implementation of the reform plan. Evidence of stakeholder buy-in to the proposed scope of work was a major criterion, though not all high-scoring states secured full support from stakeholders.

- Because local education agencies (LEAs) have varying capacity to implement reforms, *Illinois* identified a set of "Super LEAs," 12 reform-oriented districts that have pledged to move quickly on teacher evaluations and school turnarounds, in exchange for additional funding. Illinois argued that these "Super LEAs" could become a national model for a partnership of teacher unions and school districts on substantive school reform.
- *Tennessee* took a different approach and developed a comprehensive reform agenda. It passed a new law, the First to the Top Act of 2010, that encompassed many of the state's Race to the Top priorities, including meaningful use of value-added data for teacher and principal evaluations and direct state intervention in the persistently lowest achieving schools. In contrast,

California's application focused on local leadership, with the state playing more of a support role, passing through funds to LEAs.

## Standards and Assessments

Most state applicants for Race to the Top agreed to adopt the Common Core State Standards and participate in consortia to develop common, high-quality assessments—including California. States picked up points for detailed plans to support educators in their transition to these new standards and assessments, including dedicated planning time and technological resources, all with quick phase-in and implementation timelines. California won praise for its plan in this area.

- In *Florida,* the state's department of education committed to providing LEAs with the supports they need to successfully triangulate standards, curriculum, and assessment (including professional development) and increased access to instructional technologies. They also encouraged LEAs to modify school schedules to allow for increased common planning time.
- *New York* proposed to establish a working group focusing on vertically aligning its assessments with college and career requirements.

## Great Teachers and Leaders

The highest rated proposals addressed teacher evaluation head-on. They made it clear that teachers would be held accountable for improving student achievement and that decisions about placement, tenure, retention, and compensation would be tied to evaluations of teacher effectiveness. California chose to leave those decisions up to LEAs, subject to collective bargaining agreements.

- *Tennessee,* a longtime leader in using a value-added assessment system, plans to build on data that's been collected since 1992 to move immediately from the "highly qualified teacher" paradigm to an "effective teachers and leaders" model. The data from the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS) will be accessible on demand to all teachers and principals. In two years, 50 percent of teacher and principal evaluations will be based on student achievement (35 percent based on value-added data). California declined to specify what percentage of teacher evaluations must be based on student achievement.
- *Delaware* passed a series of laws that apply to all districts and will continue beyond the Race to the Top

grant period. These laws prohibit educators from being rated as "effective" unless their students demonstrate satisfactory levels of growth—although the criteria for earning an "effective" and "highly effective" rating has been criticized for being too weak. Delaware allows for removal of teachers who are rated "ineffective" for two to three consecutive years, even if they have tenure. The state also proposed to create transfer bonuses of up to $10,000 per year to attract effective teachers to high-need schools and subjects. Delaware's application also requires LEAs to adopt professional development that improves both teacher and student outcomes. In contrast, California's Race to the Top legislation hardly dealt with teacher quality.

## Data Systems to Support Instruction

Reviewers rewarded proposals that made data easily accessible to researchers, teachers, parents, and the public. They also favored strategies that included training on how to find and use data to improve instruction.

- *New York* pledged to build upon its data system, which already allows 80,000 teachers to analyze their own student data to inform their instructional decisions. The state will also develop user-friendly reports on student achievement, including performance of high school graduates at the postsecondary level. California's application was criticized for not designing concrete plans to ensure its data system would be used in the classroom to improve student outcomes.
- Finalist state *Illinois* earned high praise from Race to the Top reviewers for establishing a partnership with such groups as the Consortium on Chicago School Research and the Illinois Education Research Council to provide much-needed research capacity.
- *Tennessee* pledged to use its data system to inform policymakers on the effectiveness of Race to the Top reforms. The Tennessee Consortium on Research, Evaluation and Development will study Tennessee's Race to the Top activities, inform mid-course corrections, and provide valuable lessons for the state and the nation. California did not propose establishing research partnerships to study student data.

## Turning Around Lowest Achieving Schools

Reviewers were looking for applications that confirmed the legal authority of a state to identify and intervene in its lowest achieving schools. States earned high scores with plans to ensure that one of the four intervention

models—closure, restart, turnaround, or transformation—could be implemented at each of the identified schools with clear governance and accountability.

- Grant winner *Delaware* authorizes the state to intervene directly in its lowest achieving schools. With this capacity, the state manages the way these schools turn themselves around. Delaware will give under-performing schools the opportunity to undergo turnaround or transformation strategies. If, under these improvement models, a school does not raise student achievement within two years, the state will shut it down or restart it as a charter school.

- *Tennessee* proposed another winning turnaround strategy, phasing in an escalating series of interventions for its lowest achieving schools over time. The state pre-committed $49 million of potential Race to the Top monies to support these efforts. School turnaround will be managed by the new Achievement School District, run by the state education department in partnership with high-capacity nonprofit groups. These entities will restructure the schools and give them intensive supports to improve student achievement. California also proposed engaging external partners to help with turnarounds, but at the regional rather than state level.

- In *Florida*, state leaders would require LEAs to use Race to the Top funds to implement specific initiatives in their persistently low-achieving schools, such as extended learning time and full-day kindergarten. California did not identify any specific initiatives to improve school performance.

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

This was an all-or-nothing category with reviewers either awarding the full 15 points or zero. To earn the 15 points, states had to propose a plan to enhance STEM coursework; build collaborations with business, education, and other partners to improve STEM content delivery; and prepare students—particularly underrepresented groups—for advanced study in STEM fields. In successful applications, states integrated STEM throughout their reform plan. However, California's STEM plan was deemed to be tacked on as a minor element of the state's reform plan and earned zero points.

- Reviewers praised *Illinois* for its collaboration with public and private partners to launch STEM Learning Exchanges. This program will bring together government officials, business and industry leaders, and education organizations as partners in providing resources and assistance to participating LEAs in the form of online courses, internships, and STEM programs of study in fields such as manufacturing and health sciences.

- *Florida* earned full points for its STEM proposal to prepare more students for advanced study and careers in STEM and boost the representation of women in STEM fields. The state also agreed to participate in an international assessment of math and science aptitude, the TIMMS.

## WHAT CALIFORNIA CAN AND SHOULD DO DIFFERENTLY NEXT TIME—A ROAD MAP FOR ROUND TWO

In Round Two, California should learn from its mistakes and submit an application that addresses the Round One critiques of its application. That means correcting the application's lack of specific, substantive reforms, including aggressive timelines, and addressing the absence of a commitment from local educators to implement reforms.

State leaders should focus on the areas where the point gap was greatest, particularly around reform-related points. By addressing just the subcategories with the

| Subcategory With Largest Point Gaps* | Point Gap |
|---|---|
| Securing LEA commitment | 22 |
| Using data to improve instruction | 10 |
| Using evaluations to inform key decisions | 13 |
| Turning around the persistently lowest achieving schools | 9 |
| Ensuring successful conditions for high-performing charters | 11 |
| Emphasis on STEM | 15 |
| *Total potential make-up points* | *80* |
| **Possible score based on revising these subcategories alone** | **417** |

*Only commitment-related and reform-plan-related categories included.

> By addressing just the subcategories with the largest point gaps, California could earn up to 80 additional points. This represents most of the commitment and reform-related points California lost in Round One.

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### Securing LEA commitment (45 possible points)

In Round One, the winning states proposed specific, courageous reforms, and buy-in followed. In contrast, California submitted an application that pleased a broad set of stakeholders but was weak overall. For Round Two, California must not backslide on a reform agenda in the hopes of getting a few more districts and unions to sign on. Georgia, Florida, and Illinois all scored in the top five without full support from local school districts and teacher unions. The state must design and promote a vigorous reform agenda and then challenge districts and unions to sign on.

Given the size and capacity of many of California's large, reform-minded districts, state leaders should also carefully consider the "Super LEA" initiative from Illinois as a model for Round Two. In such a model, the state would focus on a number of high-capacity districts and provide an open door for other districts to join. Given California's size and diversity and the difficulty in securing a broad consensus without watering down reforms, this strategy allows the state to put its best foot forward.

In addition, the combined student populations of California's "Super LEAs" would exceed the population of many states. A high-quality reform proposal with the promise of improving the education of the enormous number of students of color, English-language learners, and students in poverty in California's "Super LEAs" would be hard to deny.

### Using data to improve instruction (18 possible points)

California has laws on the books to increase data access to researchers and to expand the statewide data system from preschool through higher education. The promise of this legislation has not been achieved, and California lost points as a result. In the absence of a longitudinal data system that works, the state must commit to an aggressive timeline for implementation. Many examples of high-capacity systems already exist in districts throughout the state. The state's application should tout these systems and leverage the work underway in such districts as Long Beach, Garden Grove, and Los Angeles. In this way, California can follow the lead of New York, which plans to enlarge its own successful data system that allows teachers to work together through blogs and discussion forums and lets parents see reports on their children.

### Using teacher and principal evaluations to inform key decisions (28 possible points)

State leaders avoided defining effectiveness based on evaluations, which made California's weak proposal even weaker. In Round Two, California should explicitly state that all decisions about staffing must be informed by evaluations of teacher effectiveness using student achievement as the primary factor, with a goal of equitable access to effective teachers within five years. LEAs should revise compensation to reward effectiveness over longevity and place a ceiling on the percentage of teacher pay that districts can base on seniority. As other states have done, California should make sure districts can retain effective teachers in case of layoffs, instead of having to make those decisions based on seniority alone, which disproportionately affects high-need schools.

### Turning around the persistently lowest achieving schools (35 possible points)

For years, California's school improvement strategy has been to pump money into struggling schools with little in the way of guidelines or accountability—a strategy that has had a negligible impact on school performance. It is time to try something different. Delaware offers one example: The state is giving schools two years to improve using the transformation or turnaround models. If performance hasn't improved after two years, the state will close or restart those schools. California should also consider New York's strategy, which offers capacity-building to LEAs to help sustain improvements over time, rather than episodic help for schools over the course of a grant period.

### Ensuring successful conditions for high-performing charter schools and other innovative schools (40 possible points)

California has the most charter schools of any state in the nation, and it has been an incubator for such innovations as small schools and career academies. The state has many policies in place that ensure successful conditions for these schools. State leaders should detail in the Round Two application how the charters have spurred reform and improvements since 1993, highlighting the performance of such charter management organizations as KIPP and Green Dot.

### Emphasis on STEM (15 possible points)

In Round One, California, the home of the University of California Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory and Silicon Valley, earned zero out of 15 points in this all-or-nothing category. In Round Two, California should follow the lead of other states and commit to partnerships with the state's exceptional higher education system and world-renowned technology industry to promote such programs as Cal Poly's new California STEM Innovation Network. It should tout and develop the existing California Partnership Academies that focus on careers in STEM and integrate academic, technical, and work-based learning around major industry sectors, including STEM. Finally, California should highlight and expand CSU's Math and Science Teacher Initiative and UC's California Teach program, both of which encourage students interested in math, science, and engineering to commit to teaching careers in California's K-12 system.

## CALIFORNIA, TAKE YOUR MARK...

By following these recommendations, California could earn an additional 80 points, for a revised total score of 417 points. This score would place it above New York's first-round score of 409. It would place California ten to 15 points shy of Florida (431) and Illinois (424.) These additional points could be made up in other sub-categories, such as providing supports to teachers or supporting the transition to new standards and assessments, which together represent an additional 11-point potential gain.

In Round Two of Race to the Top, California must do what it failed to do in Round One: submit an application that includes bold and concrete education-reform plans with specific timelines for implementation. The state needs an application that challenges districts and unions to put the interests of students first—by joining a coalition that promotes dramatic change. Tennessee and Delaware, along with Race to the Top finalists Florida, Illinois, and New York, have shown that powerful state-led reforms can be matched with local commitments to those reforms. Now is the time for California to promote a vigorous reform agenda and prove, once again, that it can be a source of educational innovation and promise for its students, their families, and communities.