

Race to the Top
Summary of Draft Priorities, Requirements, Selection Criteria, and Definitions
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On Friday, July 24, 2009, the draft Race to the Top materials were published by the U.S. Department of Education. Readers are advised to consult the formal posting to verify the accuracy of the information contained in this document. This document contains the following sections: (1) General Summary, (2) Priorities for Evaluating Applications, (3) Application Requirements, (4) Selection Criteria, and (5) Definitions.

General Summary

Phases:

- a. States that are ready to apply may do so in Phase I, which will open in late 2009.
- b. States needing more time may apply in Phase II, which will open in late spring 2010.
- c. A separate Race to the Top Standards and Assessment competition, for up to \$350 million, related to developing assessments for State consortia applicants.

In preparation for submitting applications, the materials set forth the following prerequisites:

- The State must have no legal, statutory, or regulatory barriers to linking data about student achievement or student growth to teachers for the purpose of teacher and principal evaluation.
- The State must have approved applications for Phase I and II of the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund.
- The application must comprehensively address each of the four education reform areas specified in ARRA to demonstrate that the State and its participating LEAs are taking a systemic approach to education reform.
- State Reform Conditions Criteria will be a critical measure of past progress and current conditions:
 - i. Developing and adopting common standards
 - ii. Developing and implementing common, high-quality assessments
 - iii. Fully implementing a statewide longitudinal data system
 - iv. Providing alternative pathways for aspiring teachers and principals
 - v. Intervening in the lowest performing schools and LEAs
 - vi. Increasing the supply of high-quality charter schools
 - vii. Demonstrating significant progress
 - viii. Making education funding a priority
 - ix. Enlisting statewide support and commitment

In preparing applications, states should consider that:

- A State plan must include the proposed activities for LEAs that will advance the four reform areas.
- States must set goals and annual targets in each reform area.
- Race to the Top will reward States for having created the conditions for reform (via State Reform Conditions Criteria) and provide incentives for States to implement outstanding reform strategies that integrate across the four ARRA reform areas (via Reform Plan Criteria).

Upon selection for a Race to the Top grant, states must:

- Distribute 50 percent of the funds to LEAs based on the Title I funding formula.
- The State and its participating LEAs must use funds under this program to participate in a national evaluation of the program if the Department chooses to conduct one. In addition, the Department is seeking comment on whether a State should, instead of or in addition to a national evaluation, be required to conduct its own evaluation of its program activities using funds under this program.
- Participate in all applicable technical assistance activities that may be conducted.
- Make freely available all outputs (e.g., materials, tools, processes, systems) it produces related to this program, including (but not limited to) by posting the outputs on any website identified or sponsored by the Department.
- Provide annual reports that describe progress versus plans, and in which the State indicates its actual performance versus the annual targets it established for each performance measure in its application.
- Meet its grant goals, timelines, budget, and annual targets; adhere to an annual fund drawdown schedule that is tied to these goals, timelines, budget, and annual targets.

Priorities for Evaluating Applications

The following are the five priorities for evaluating the Race to the Top grant applications:

1. Comprehensive Approach to the Four Education Reform Areas
2. Emphasis on STEM—Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
3. Expansion and Adaptation of Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems
4. P–20 Coordination and Vertical Alignment
5. School-Level Conditions for Reform and Innovation

Each priority is assigned a designation from the following list that is defined in the materials:

1. Absolute priority
2. Competitive priority
3. Invitational priority

Absolute Priority: Comprehensive Approach to the Four Education Reform Areas

- The State must include in its application the State’s plan for comprehensively addressing each of the four reform areas and demonstrate a systemic approach to education reform.
- The State must describe how it intends to implement policies and practices that are designed to:
 - Increase student achievement.
 - Reduce achievement gaps across subgroups.
 - Increase rates at which students graduate from high school prepared for college and careers.

Competitive Priority: Emphasis on STEM—Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics

The State’s application must describe plans to address the need to:

- Offer a rigorous course of study in the sciences, technology, engineering, and mathematics.
- Cooperate with industry experts, museums, universities, research centers, or other STEM-capable community partners to prepare and assist teachers in integrating STEM content across grades and disciplines, in promoting effective and relevant instruction, and in offering applied learning opportunities for students.
- Prepare more students for advanced study and careers in the sciences, technology, engineering, and mathematics, including addressing the needs of underrepresented groups and of women and girls in the areas of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

Invitational Priority:

Expansion and Adaptation of Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems:

- Plans to expand statewide longitudinal data systems to include or integrate data from special education programs, limited English proficiency programs, early childhood programs, human resources, finance, health, postsecondary, and other relevant areas.
- Applications in which States propose working together to adapt one State’s statewide longitudinal data system so that it may be used, in whole or in part, by other State(s), rather than having each State build or continue building such system(s) independently.

P–20 Coordination and Vertical Alignment: Applications in which the State plans to address how early childhood programs, K–12 schools, postsecondary institutions, and workforce organizations will coordinate to improve all parts of the education system and create a more seamless P–20 route for students.

School-Level Conditions for Reform and Innovation: The State’s participating LEAs provide schools with flexibilities and autonomies conducive to reform and innovation, such as:

1. Selecting staff
2. Implementing new structures and formats for the school day or school year that expand learning time
3. Placing budgets under the schools’ control
4. Awarding credit to students based on student performance instead of instructional time
5. Providing comprehensive services to high-needs students

Application Requirements

The Department proposes that States must meet the following eight requirements when submitting applications:

1. The State's application must be signed by the governor, the State's chief school officer, and the president of the State board of education.
2. The State must describe the progress it has made to date in each of the four education reform areas, including how the State has used ARRA and other federal and state funding over the last several years to pursue reforms in these areas.
3. The State must provide financial data to show whether and to what extent the percentage of the total revenues available to the State that were used to support elementary, secondary, and public higher education for FY 2009 increased, decreased, or remained the same compared with FY 2008.
4. The State must describe its statewide support from stakeholders and LEAs, including public charter schools identified as LEAs under state law.
5. The State must include a budget that details how it will use grant funds and other resources to meet targets and perform related functions, including how it will use funds awarded under this program to:
 - Achieve its targets for improving student achievement and graduation rates and for closing achievement gaps.
 - Give priority to high-needs LEAs, in addition to providing 50 percent of the grant to participating LEAs based on their relative shares of funding under part A of Title I of ESEA.
6. The State must provide, for each State Reform Conditions Criterion, a description of the State's current status in meeting that Criterion, and at a minimum, the information requested as supporting evidence for the Criterion. The Appendix to the notice contains a table listing the proposed evidence.
7. The State must provide, for each Reform Plan Criterion, a detailed plan for use of grant funds that includes, but need not be limited to, the activities to be undertaken, the goals and rationale for the activities, the timeline for implementation, the party responsible for implementing the activities, the resources the State will use to support the activities, the State's annual targets, if applicable, for the performance measures aligned to the Criterion, and the evidence requested in support of that Criterion (if any).
8. The State must submit a certification from the state attorney general, or other chief state legal officer, that the State's description of, and statements and conclusions concerning, state law in its application are complete, accurate, and constitute a reasonable interpretation of state law.

Applications that include plans for reform efforts not covered by a performance measure specified by the Department are encouraged to propose performance measures and annual targets related to those efforts.

Selection Criteria

Points will be announced in the final package. Additional considerations are the extent to which states set ambitious but achievable annual targets against each performance measure to support the credibility of the goals and plans.

State Reform Conditions Criteria: Used to assess a State’s past progress and its success in creating conditions for reform in specific areas related to the four ARRA education reform areas.

Reform Plan Criteria: Used to assess States’ plans for future efforts in the four ARRA reform areas.

	Selection Criteria	Type of Criteria
Standards and Assessments	Developing and adopting common standards	Conditions
	Developing and implementing common, high-quality assessments	
	Supporting transition to enhanced standards and high-quality assessments	Plan
Data Systems to Support Instruction	Fully implementing a statewide longitudinal data system	Conditions
	Accessing and using State data	Plan
	Using data to improve instruction	
Great Teachers and Leaders	Providing alternative pathways for aspiring teachers and principals	Conditions
	Differentiating teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance	Plan
	Ensuring equitable distribution of effective teachers and principals	
	Reporting the effectiveness of teacher and principal preparation programs	
	Providing effective support to teachers and principals	
Turning Around Struggling Schools	Intervening in the lowest performing schools and LEAs	Conditions
	Increasing the supply of high-quality charter schools	
	Turning around struggling schools	Plan
Overall Selection Criteria	Demonstrating significant progress	Conditions
	Making education funding a priority	
	Enlisting statewide support and commitment	
	Raising achievement and closing gaps	Plan
	Building strong statewide capacity to implement, scale, and sustain proposed plans	

Definitions—Condensed

- **Alternative certification routes** means pathways to certification that are authorized under the State’s laws or regulations that allow the establishment and operation of teacher and administrator preparation programs in the State that have the following characteristics: (a) can be provided by various types of qualified providers, including both institutions of higher education and other providers; (b) provide a clinical/student teaching experience; (c) significantly limit the amount of coursework required or have options to test out of courses; and (d) award the level of certification that permits a candidate who successfully completes the program to teach or lead in public schools within the State.
- **Common set of K–12 standards** means a set of content standards that define what students must know and be able to do and that are identical across all States in a consortium. Notwithstanding this, a State may supplement the common standards with additional standards, provided that the additional standards do not exceed 15 percent of the State’s total standards for that content area.
- **Effective principal** means a principal whose students, overall and for each subgroup, demonstrate acceptable rates of student growth. States may supplement this definition as they see fit as long as principal effectiveness is judged, in significant measure, by student growth.
- **Effective teacher** means a teacher whose students achieve acceptable rates of student growth. States may supplement this definition as they see fit as long as teacher effectiveness is judged, in significant measure, by student growth.
- **Formative assessment** means an assessment process that is embedded in instruction and is used by teachers and students to provide instant feedback on student understanding and to adjust ongoing teaching and learning accordingly.
- **Graduation rate** means the four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate. A State may also use, as a supplement to this rate, extended adjusted cohort graduation rates that are approved by the secretary.
- **Highly effective principal** means a principal whose students, overall and for each subgroup, demonstrate high rates of student growth. States may supplement this definition as they see fit as long as principal effectiveness is judged, in significant measure, by student growth.
- **Highly effective teacher** means a teacher whose students achieve high rates of student growth. States may supplement this definition as they see fit as long as teacher effectiveness is judged, in significant measure, by student growth.
- **High-needs LEA** means an LEA with one or more high-poverty schools.
- **High-poverty school** means a school in the highest quartile of schools in the State with respect to poverty level, using a measure of poverty determined by the State.
- **High-quality assessment** means an assessment designed to measure a student’s understanding of, and ability to apply, critical concepts through the use of a variety of item types, formats, and administration conditions. Such assessments are structured to enable measurement of student achievement and student growth are of high technical quality and include the assessment of students with disabilities and limited English proficient students.
- **Instructional improvement systems** means tools that provide teachers, principals, and administrators with meaningful support for a cycle of continuous instructional improvement, including activities such as instructional planning; gathering information; interim assessments; analyzing information with the support of rapid-time reporting; using this information to inform decisions on appropriate next steps; and evaluating the effectiveness of the actions taken.
- **Interim assessment** means an assessment given at regular and specified intervals throughout the school year, designed to evaluate students’ knowledge and skills relative to a specific set of academic standards, the results of which can be aggregated in order to inform teachers and administrators at the student, classroom, school, and LEA levels.
- **Persistently lowest performing schools** means Title I schools in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring in the State and the secondary schools in the State that are equally as low achieving as these Title I schools and are eligible for, but do not receive, Title I funds. When considering which schools are the lowest achieving, the State must consider both the absolute performance of schools on the State assessments in reading/language arts and mathematics and whether schools have made progress on these assessments.

- **Rapid-time**, in reference to reporting and availability of school- and LEA-level data, means that data are available quickly enough to inform current lessons, instruction, and related supports; in most cases, this will be within 72 hours of an assessment or data gathering in classrooms, schools, and LEAs.
- **Student achievement** means, at a minimum:
 - (a) For tested grades and subjects: A student’s score on the State’s assessment under section 1111(b)(3) of ESEA
 - (b) For nontested grades and subjects: An alternative measure of student performance (e.g., student performance on interim assessments [as defined in this notice], rates at which students are on track to graduate from high school, percentage of students enrolled in advanced placement courses who take advanced placement exams, rates at which students meet goals in individualized education programs, student scores on end-of course exams)
- **Student growth** means the change in achievement data for an individual student between two points in time. Growth may be measured by a variety of approaches, but any approach used must be statistically rigorous and based on student achievement (as defined in this notice) data and also may include other measures of student learning in order to increase the construct validity and generalizability of the information.
- **Total revenues available to the State** means either (a) projected or actual total State revenues for education and other purposes for the relevant year or (b) projected or actual total State appropriations for education and other purposes for the relevant year.
- **America COMPETES Act elements** (as specified in section 6401(e)(2)(D)) means:
 - (1) A unique statewide student identifier that does not permit a student to be individually identified by users of the system
 - (2) Student-level enrollment, demographic, and program participation information
 - (3) Student-level information about the points at which students exit, transfer in, transfer out, drop out, or complete P–16 education programs
 - (4) The capacity to communicate with higher education data systems
 - (5) A State data audit system assessing data quality, validity, and reliability
 - (6) Yearly test records of individual students with respect to assessments under section 1111(b) of ESEA (20 U.S.C. 6311(b))
 - (7) Information on students not tested by grade and subject
 - (8) A teacher identifier system with the ability to match teachers to students
 - (9) Student-level transcript information, including information on courses completed and grades earned
 - (10) Student-level college readiness test scores
 - (11) Information regarding the extent to which students transition successfully from secondary school to postsecondary education, including whether students enroll in remedial coursework
 - (12) Other information determined necessary to address alignment and adequate preparation for success in postsecondary education