



Race To The Top Review of the Requirements

Overview

In its broadest terms, Race to the Top (RTTT) is intended to distribute a national total of \$4.35 billion to states that have solid plans to produce certain reforms and can demonstrate that they have conditions in place to produce success. These reforms are aimed at raising student achievement state-wide with a special emphasis on infusing substantial funding into the persistently lowest achieving schools.

While the following material provides the structure of the program, your state will have flexibility in determining program components and priority. You may wish to be in contact with your state school boards association in terms of guidance on the particulars of working with your state officials.

States will have to submit their RTTT applications for the first round by the middle of January, 2010; and by June 1, 2010 for the second round.

The [Federal Register notice](#) (please note, it is 100 pages) outlines the program and is organized as follows:

- Summary of changes----- Front page-59696
- Discussion section----- 59696-59798
- REQUIREMENTS FOR THE PROGRAM----- 59798-59806
- Evidence and performance measures (Appendix A)----- 59808-59811
- Scoring rubric (Appendix B)----- 59812-59828
- School Intervention models (Appendix C)----- 59828-59830
- Participating LEA memorandum of understanding (Appendix D)----- 59830-59834

The RTTT component that addresses turning around the persistently lowest achieving schools has been changed to match the language that drives the \$3.5 billion School Improvement Grant (SIG) program (which was NSBA's recommended choice). Because the SIG program will apply to state intervention policies in all states, these provisions are important to your district even if your state does not receive RTTT funding.

The Appendices

The four appendices in the Federal Register will provide considerable guidance relating to specific issues. They are as follows:

- Evidence and Performance Measures (Appendix A). This appendix includes the kinds of evidence that states must produce to support their applications as well as the performance metrics for what is to be accomplished in each of the areas addressed in your state’s reform agenda. As such, they provide some shape of what is expected and the accountability involved.
- Scoring Rubric (Appendix B). The Rubric provides a breakdown of the number of points that could be awarded for the various reform activities that your state undertakes. The relative point scores for these items should be read with the basic requirements and appendix A to help determine the extent to which your state really wants to pursue specific items.
- School Intervention Model (Appendix C). This appendix sets forth the criteria that states (and “participating LEAs”) would have to meet in order to receive local funding for turning schools around. (Reminder: These requirements will also apply to the \$3.5 billion School Improvement Grant program which provides funding to all states utilizing these interventions).
- Participating LEA Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) (Appendix D). This appendix provides a model MOU that school districts seeking to be “participating LEAs” can use for evidence of their commitment and support as well as to set forth the “scope of work” that they plan to undertake with their part.

What your state does not have to do to be a successful grant recipient:

1. Takeovers. In showing how it will turn around low achieving schools, states do not have to contemplate using state or mayoral takeovers.
2. Charter Schools. The cap on charter schools does not have to be raised or eliminated for a state to be eligible for a grant as long as the cap is not effectively limiting the use of charters. Moreover, to earn points, on its application the state can show that it has other innovative approaches to providing autonomous public schools without charters.
3. Common Standards and Assessments. The state does not have to adopt common standards or assessments, but will get application points for doing so—and more points for joining a large consortium, such as the one operated by CCSSO/NGA.
4. Funding for “Participating LEA’s”. While states can set criteria for districts to receive funding as “participating LEAs” (i.e., at least 50% of the state’s RTTT funding must go for the purpose), it can’t pick and choose among those LEAs that meet the requirements, nor can it determine district funding levels (which must go on accordance with the Title I formula).

Select program components you may be interested in:

1. “Involved LEAs”. The proposed rules define “participating” LEAs as those who agree to substantially meet the state’s RTTT requirements. In direct response to NSBA’s comments that local districts would have to comply with general state requirements, ED created a new category of local grant recipients called “involved LEAs”. These districts can receive grants even though they did not

qualify for “participating LEA” funding by meeting some purposes in the state plan but not all. They would be funded from the 50% of a state’s RTTT funding that is not committed for “participating LEAs”. Their funded activities could include implementation of new standards and assessments, data systems, etc.

2. Stakeholder Sign Off. Points are awarded for local commitment and stakeholder support in general.
3. Standards. The final rule delayed the deadline for adopting common standards to August 2, 2010, in part, to enable Phase 1 applicants to vet the new standards with local school districts and others. Phase 2 states will need to show a plan to adopt. Accordingly, if useful, the state plan might include provisions as to how the state plans to explain and implement the standards (including providing funding and technical resources to local districts and possibly have transitional rules regarding accountability).

As a local school board member, you might be interested in what your state is considering as the application is put together:

1. Program Requirements and Absolute Priorities

There are several things that states must do in order to have their application considered. Most prominently, they must have a comprehensive and coherent reform agenda that articulates their goals around the four ARRA principles (i.e. standards/assessments, effective teachers, longitudinal data systems, and raising achievement in low achieving schools). This includes sufficient LEA participation and commitment to reach goals—which also includes local collaboration to increase student achievement, reduce the achievement gap, etc. Additionally states must have their Phase 1 and 2 of the Stabilization program approved by ED and have no state law prohibiting evaluating teachers and principals on the basis of student achievement or growth.

2. Competing for Points

There are nineteen selection criteria around which states can develop their application. Grants will be awarded to states on the basis of a 500 point scoring system (see the Rubric in Appendix B). Hence, many of the specific RTTT elements are not absolute requirements for a state to have or do in a particular way (but within the framework provided). However, the state has an incentive to include and treat items in a way that competitively earns points. That’s important to remember in refining or excluding plan elements. It is also important for the state to earn points for having broad school board commitment and support (which earns points).

3. Selection Criteria

Points will be awarded on the basis of the conditions in the state that set the stage for success as well as for meeting specific reform criteria in the following broad Rubric categories:

- a. Articulating the state’s reform agenda and other success functions-----125 points
- b. Standards and assessments-----70 points
- c. Data systems to support institution-----47 points
- d. Great teachers and leaders-----138 points
- e. Turning around the lowest achieving schools-----50 points
- f. General -----55 points
- Note: States can earn 15 points by emphasizing on STEM-----15 points
- g. TOTAL-----500 points

4. Competitive Preference and Total Invitational Priorities

Additional 15 points (competitive preference) will be given to applications that include a high-quality plan for rigorous courses in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) and which meet related criteria (e.g. reaching under-represented groups). ED is particularly interested in applications that address four specific priority areas. But additional points are not awarded for invitational priorities. These areas include: 1) early education to produce better outcomes for higher need students, 2) expansion and adoption of state-wide longitudinal data systems (also to include data from special education and ELL programs) 3) P-20 coordination and alignment, and 4) school level conditions for reform (i.e. providing schools with flexibility and autonomy in such areas as staff selection, school day/calendar, budget, and giving students credit for performance not instructional time).

Review of select program features

There are several program features that require additional explanation in this overview of the RTTT program.

1. Charter Schools

The *proposed* requirements provided that a state cannot have a law prohibiting or inhibiting an increase in its number of charter schools. This provision was continued in the final requirement but clarified in the official discussion (not the requirements per se) to mean that a) removing a cap was not an eligibility requirement but a provision that would determine points, b) that a cap would not be held against a state so long as it doesn't work as a limitation to creating charters, and c) states would also earn points under this section by having other approaches like "innovative autonomous public schools" (which sounds like site-based management, e.g., that local school hires staff, determines budget, school calendar etc.) other than charter schools.

2. Turning Around the Persistently Lowest Achieving Schools

- a. Turn Around Model. This includes replacing the principal, screening all staff and rehiring no more than 50 percent and adopting a new governance. That can mean takeovers which the state does not have to authorize because it can also mean establishing a special turn around office that reports to the superintendent (which was added consistent with NSBA's comments).
- b. Restart Model. This model includes converting to a charter school or hiring an education management company to run the school (most likely both involve replacing the principal).
- c. School Closure. This model envisions closing the school down and sending the students to a higher achieving school.
- d. Transformation Model. This model would involve specific interventions within the existing school but would require replacing the principal. A change was made to allow this model to be utilized as an equal priority with the other models rather than the original language which only allowed use of this model if other models were not possible (this change reflected NSBA's comments). However, in districts with nine or more persistently low achieving schools, not more than one-half of these schools can use this model. Note, this model, like the others, contains "must do" activities to be utilized. But, unlike the others, has "permissible" activities—which provide ideas for how funds could be used.
- e. There are also other provisions that do things like "grandfather in" the use or recent interventions that contain certain elements.

(Reminder: This entire section applies to the School Improvement Grant program as well as to Race to the Top.) The state, and therefore “participating LEAs” must utilize one of four models to receive turn-around school funding.

3. Great Teachers and Leaders

This is a major area for earning points. Here ED will look at the extent to which a state has legal authority for alternative routes to teacher and principal certification and the extent to which they are doing it.

The plan criteria would involve 1) measuring growth, 2) using evaluation systems for teacher and principals that utilize multiple rating categories and take student growth into account as a significant factor, 3) conducting annual evaluations that include data on student growth, and 4) using these evaluations at a minimum to inform decisions regarding: a) developing teachers and principals, b) compensation, c) granting tenure, and d) removing ineffective tenured and non-tenured personnel.

Plan criteria also involve the extent to which the state will ensure the equitable distribution of teachers and principals in collaboration with “participating LEAs” in accordance with numeral targets to students in high poverty and/or high minority schools. Also plan criteria are aimed at increasing the number of effectiveness teachers in hard-to-staff areas like STEM as well as recruitment and compensation (but no specific mention of performance pay).

What should you do as a local school board member?

1. Request information from your superintendent and central office staff regarding information such as:
 - District’s eligibility and capacity to participate in RTTT
 - Anticipated action by your state regarding RTTT application
 - Specific roles and responsibilities of your school district as a participant of RTTT
2. You may wish to be in contact with your state school boards association for guidance on the particulars of working with your state officials.

NSBA will develop materials on how school districts apply for funds from states that receive RTTT grants and what will need to be included in your district’s plan, etc.