Fundamental Change

Innovation in America's Schools Under Race to the Top

Executive Summary

November 2015

U.S. Department of Education
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November 2015

All hyperlinks included in this document were active as of November 1, 2015.

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From the Secretary

A strong education opens doors to opportunity — and all children with dreams and determination should have the chance to reach their full potential. With this recognition, in 2009, President Obama and I announced a Race to the Top for American education.

The program offered unprecedented resources — $4 billion — to states that committed to reshaping their education systems and ensuring every student would graduate college- and career-ready, regardless of disability, race, zip code or family income. Although this program provided a larger sum of discretionary funding for education than had been available to states ever before, Race to the Top was not just about the money. It was about ensuring that every child in America — especially our most vulnerable — can thrive.

Then and now, the program also represented a groundbreaking approach to federal grantmaking. It called for the best ideas to improve teaching and learning from educators and leaders in states and communities throughout the country. The program enabled states and districts to expand upon effective and promising practices already in existence that were tailored to unique, local contexts.

In addition to building on what works, Race to the Top encouraged and supported state and local leadership on tough education reforms, which catalyzed deep thinking — and legislative activity — in states about improving how students are prepared for success in school and in life.

Even in states that did not win awards, the work to develop an application and establish the conditions for positive change unleashed an incredible amount of courage and creativity at the local level.

To break from a status quo that has traditionally denied disadvantaged students access to high standards, great teachers and leaders, and outstanding schools, an innovative, all-hands-on-deck approach is necessary. As a result, Race to the Top acknowledged the importance of collaboration — from administrators, to teachers, to unions, to parents and communities, to elected officials.

Race to the Top asked a lot of states — from establishing rigorous student achievement standards, to developing and supporting teachers and leaders, to leveraging data systems to inform and enhance instruction, to turning around the lowest-performing schools. But if we are to change the odds for our most vulnerable students and ensure a world-class education for every child, we must ask a lot of ourselves.

This work is complex and interconnected. And this work is far from done. Too many students, especially in underserved groups and communities, lack access to a quality education and supportive, well-resourced schools.

Despite the challenges, there are encouraging signs of progress. Over the course of the Obama administration's six years, America's schools have experienced positive change — and America's students have made gains. The high school graduation rate is at the highest point ever recorded. Dropout rates are down sharply for low-income and minority students; and, since 2008, college enrollment for African-Americans and Hispanics has increased by more than a million.

Ensuring that all students can access life-changing opportunity through education will require sustained effort. The real lessons from Race to the Top will be measured in the program's long-term impacts on student learning. There is no silver bullet solution or singular approach to improving education — states are taking multiple paths, and they are learning from each other in this work.

Race to the Top demonstrated that teachers, principals, administrators and others were — and still are — eager to work urgently and collaboratively to solve their most pressing education challenges. At the federal level, our hope is that bold blueprints for education reform both inspired and supported by Race to the Top will continue to be implemented in states across America so that all students can achieve.

Arne Duncan
U.S. Secretary of Education

Executive Summary

Race to the Top represented an unprecedented approach to competitive grant-making by giving states and districts the opportunity to build on their successes and innovate across their schools to improve outcomes and expand opportunities for millions of students. President Barack Obama launched the $4 billion program in 2009 as part of the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA)*,[1] with the recognition that urgent improvements in education were needed to prepare all students for a globally competitive economy and to drive change for low-income students, students of color and other groups of students for whom educational progress had come haltingly, if at all.

The goal of the program was ambitious: to bring together leaders from every level of school governance — from classroom teachers to state-level officials — to develop plans that would help prepare students for success in an information- and innovation-driven job market, where a quality education is essential both to national economic strength and to individual opportunity. Race to the Top invited state leaders to put forward plans to improve not one or two isolated elements of their schools, but to develop and implement comprehensive statewide plans to improve entire systems.

With the Department's support and the funds to make comprehensive changes, Race to the Top empowered visionary leaders to put forward bold plans for change and enable successful local initiatives to expand and flourish. And it encouraged states to establish the conditions for positive change in their school systems. While the greatest change was expected to occur in states that were awarded funds, the competition encouraged broad-based, systemic educational improvements even in states that did not win Race to the Top funding. States across the country saw an extraordinary surge of legislative activity aimed at improving education.

The need for change

A generation ago, good jobs — and a path to the middle class — were available to individuals who did not finish high school. In today's world, those paths are rapidly disappearing.[2] More than ever, a full, quality education is a prerequisite for success and economic security — not

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[1] Sections 14005 and 14006 of the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA)* (Public Law 111-5), as amended, authorized the Race to the Top program, referred to in *ARRA* as the State Incentive Grant Fund.

[2] Anthony Carnevale, Nicole Smith, and Jeff Strohl, *Recovery: Job Growth and Education Requirements Through 2020* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, 2013), https://cew.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Recovery2020.FR_.Web_.pdf.

just for individuals, but also for nations. Today, employers seek experts and skilled individuals, regardless of national boundaries, ratcheting up the stakes for nations to educate their people well. Yet even as the premium on education has increased, the United States is falling behind. A historic and worldwide recession in 2009 further increased the urgency for America to improve its education systems. And while that need touched communities everywhere, it was most pronounced in communities of poverty and disadvantage. Gaps in college opportunities for individuals in the lowest-income brackets persist, as low-income students are less likely to enroll and graduate from college.[3] Then and now, the need for educational improvements, for students and for the nation, is profoundly urgent.

How Race to the Top worked

The essential idea of Race to the Top was to create incentives for states to continue the good work they had already done to improve education in their states and put forward bold, systemic plans that would lead to, in the President's words, "Better standards. Better teaching. Better schools."[4] Race to the Top empowered states to accelerate the pace and reach of their improvement activities and rewarded states that chose to create and implement comprehensive improvement agendas that they believed would increase student achievement and narrow achievement gaps in their states. States with records of success in improving teaching and learning could tap into the enthusiasm and creativity from constituents who had supported previous improvement efforts and use that support to drive systems-level change and disrupt the status quo. The focus was on breaking down silos that in the past had led to fragmented and isolated educational improvements in favor of making interconnected improvements simultaneously in four core areas:[5]

- Establishing high, challenging learning standards aligned with readiness for college and careers, and transforming instructional practices to enable students to meet the more challenging expectations.

- Developing and supporting effective teachers and leaders.

- Creating data systems and using technology to inform and enhance instruction.

- Turning around the lowest-performing schools.

Race to the Top rewarded states for enlisting their districts and key stakeholders (e.g., local officials, nonprofits, institutions of higher education, unions) in designing and implementing their comprehensive plans. The theory of action was that by working together, support for change and innovation would be built across key constituencies and sectors and enable states to push forward bold, and challenging, initiatives.

Finally, Race to the Top used transparency to advance knowledge about improving education and allow states to learn from each other. States' Race to the Top applications and reviewers' comments were posted online to be examined by the public and the media. Publicly posted annual reports on progress, technical assistance resources, and amendments provided information for the media and the public to evaluate and for researchers to analyze.

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[3] Martha J. Bailey and Susan M. Dynarksi, *Gains and Gaps: Changing Inequality in U.S. College Entry and Completion* (National Bureau of Economic Research [NBER] Working Paper No. 17633), (Cambridge, MA: NBER, 2011), http://www.nber.org/papers/w17633.

[4] Remarks by the President at the Department of Education (July 2009), https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-department-education.

[5] These four core areas were referred to as "assurance areas" in the Race to the Top Notice Inviting Applications. See Department of Education, *Overview Information: Race to the Top Fund: Notice Inviting Applications for New Awards for Fiscal Year (FY) 2010*, 74 Fed. Reg. 59836 (Nov. 18, 2009). Department of Education, *Overview Information; Race to the Top Fund; Notice Inviting Applications for New Awards for Fiscal Year (FY) 2010*, 74 Fed. Reg. 19496 (Apr. 14, 2010).

Forty-six states and the District of Columbia submitted Race to the Top applications. In 2010, through the Phase 1 and 2 competitions, 11 states and the District of Columbia received awards ranging from $75 million to $700 million to make systemwide, coordinated educational improvements for students and teachers in the four core areas. State work under the grants ended in summer 2015, except in Hawaii, where grant work ended in September 2014.[6]

Five years after the largest Race to the Top grants were awarded,[7] it is the right time to ask: What did Race to the Top accomplish? What worked and what didn't? Perhaps most important: What lessons can the nation take away to improve education in the years ahead? This report begins to answer these questions, with a focus on the first two phases of Race to the Top, the phases funded through *ARRA* and awarded to 11 states and the District of Columbia. The content of this report draws upon information provided through a new performance management approach implemented with Race to the Top states that included monthly progress calls, annual performance reviews and publicly available annual progress reports. This report also draws upon state reflections on progress and lessons learned through narratives submitted at the end of the four-year grant period, and through discussions hosted by the Reform Support Network (RSN).[8] Throughout the grant period, the RSN connected Race to the Top states with experts in the field who provided technical assistance, created opportunities for states to learn directly from other states, and documented lessons learned along the way to inform efforts in other states.

Race to the Top's success ultimately must be measured by its long-term impact on student learning. Because simultaneous change in multiple systems takes time, it is too early to make that determination of success now. However, many outcomes are trending in a positive direction, including higher graduation rates and Advanced Placement (AP) course taking (see pages ix and xiii). This report focuses on implementation — the successes and challenges to institutionalize broad and deep improvements throughout states. It also seeks to highlight the key practices and lessons learned during the first five years of implementing Race to the Top.

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[6] Delaware and Tennessee's four-year Race to the Top grants ended in June and July 2014, respectively. The four-year grant period for the other 10 grantees ended in September 2014. All 12 grantees had the opportunity to extend their project period to September 2015 for a fifth year. Every state, except Hawaii, requested and was approved to extend portions of their work to September 2015.

[7] Since making the first 12 Race to the Top awards, the Department made seven additional awards to states and also made awards under the Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge and Race to the Top – District competitions.

[8] Working with Department staff, the Reform Support Network (RSN) provided Race to the Top states with technical assistance to implement their plans. Composed of subject-matter experts in the field, the RSN led in-person and virtual meetings, webinars, and working groups with leaders and stakeholders in Race to the Top states through July 2015.

Students Are Graduating From High School at Increased Rates

Change in graduation rate between SY 2010–11 and SY 2013–14 in Phase 1 and 2 states

Student groups in Race to the Top states

All students
- 2010–11: 76.5%
- 2011–12: 78.3%
- 2012–13: 79.1%
- 2013–14: 79.9%

White
- 2010–11: 83.5%
- 2011–12: 85.2%
- 2012–13: 85.8%
- 2013–14: 86.5%

Black
- 2010–11: 65.0%
- 2011–12: 67.2%
- 2012–13: 68.4%
- 2013–14: 69.5%

Hispanic
- 2010–11: 65.9%
- 2011–12: 68.0%
- 2012–13: 69.3%
- 2013–14: 70.6%

Children with disabilities
- 2010–11: 52.9%
- 2011–12: 55.4%
- 2012–13: 55.8%
- 2013–14: 58.0%

Economically disadvantaged students
- 2010–11: 67.1%
- 2011–12: 69.4%
- 2012–13: 70.2%
- 2013–14: 71.1%

Limited English proficient students
- 2010–11: 50.8%
- 2011–12: 53.1%
- 2012–13: 52.8%
- 2013–14: 52.1%

Percent (0, 20, 40, 60, 80, 100)

Legend: ☐ 2010–11   ☐ 2011–12   ☐ 2012–13   ☐ 2013–14

Note: The number of students in each cohort for school years 2010–11, 2011–12, 2012–13, and 2013–14, by group, are as follows: All students: 1,069,243; 1,045,900; 1,045,201; and 1,032,813. Children with disabilities: 141,847; 137,788; 139,839; and 133,817. Economically disadvantaged students: 434,490; 447,166; 468,753; and 466,948. Limited English proficient students: 45,753; 45,567; 45,450; and 46,496. White: 591,107; 574,240; 566,958; and 554,697. Black: 266,068; 255,190; 249,152; and 241,391. Hispanic: 138,260; 139,764; 149,667; and 155,688. For more information on these data, see "Data Notes" on page xviii.

Source: State submissions to the U.S. Department of Education's ED*Facts* Reporting System.

College Enrollment Rates

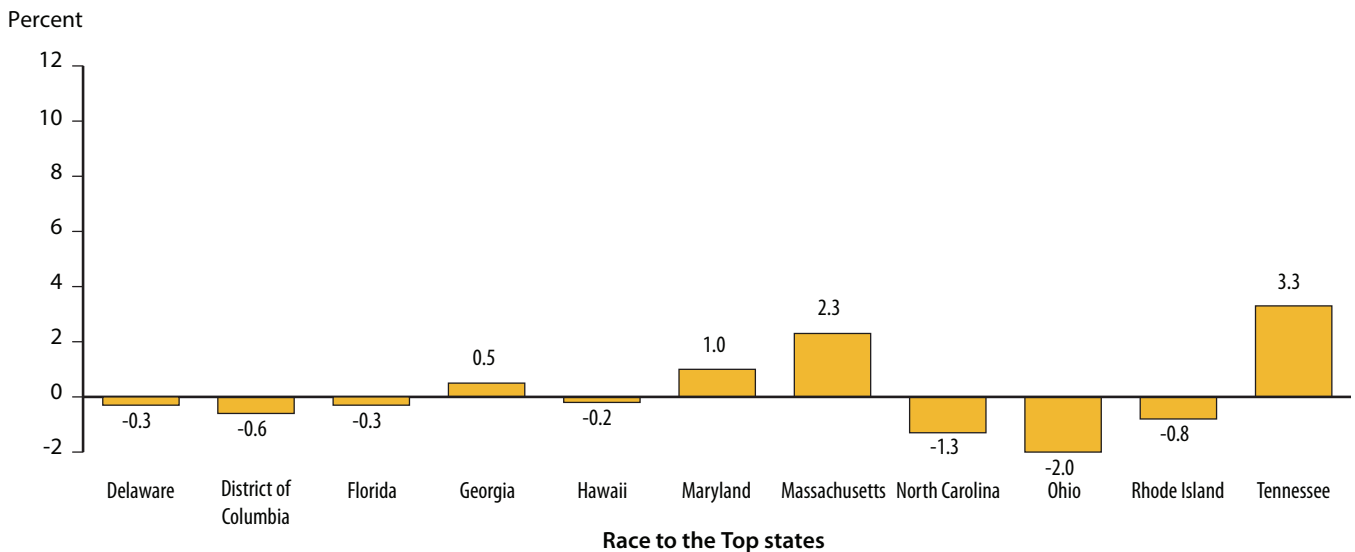## Change in rates of enrollment in institutions of higher education in SY 2012–13 and SY 2013–14 in Phase 1 and 2 states

Percent

State	2012–13	2013–14
Delaware	66.7	66.4
District of Columbia	55.6	55.0
Florida	75.6	75.3
Georgia	73.7	74.2
Hawaii	63.4	63.2
Maryland	69.0	70.0
Massachusetts	74.3	76.6
North Carolina	68.1	66.9
Ohio	45.1	43.1
Rhode Island	67.3	66.5
Tennessee	58.7	62.0

Race to the Top states
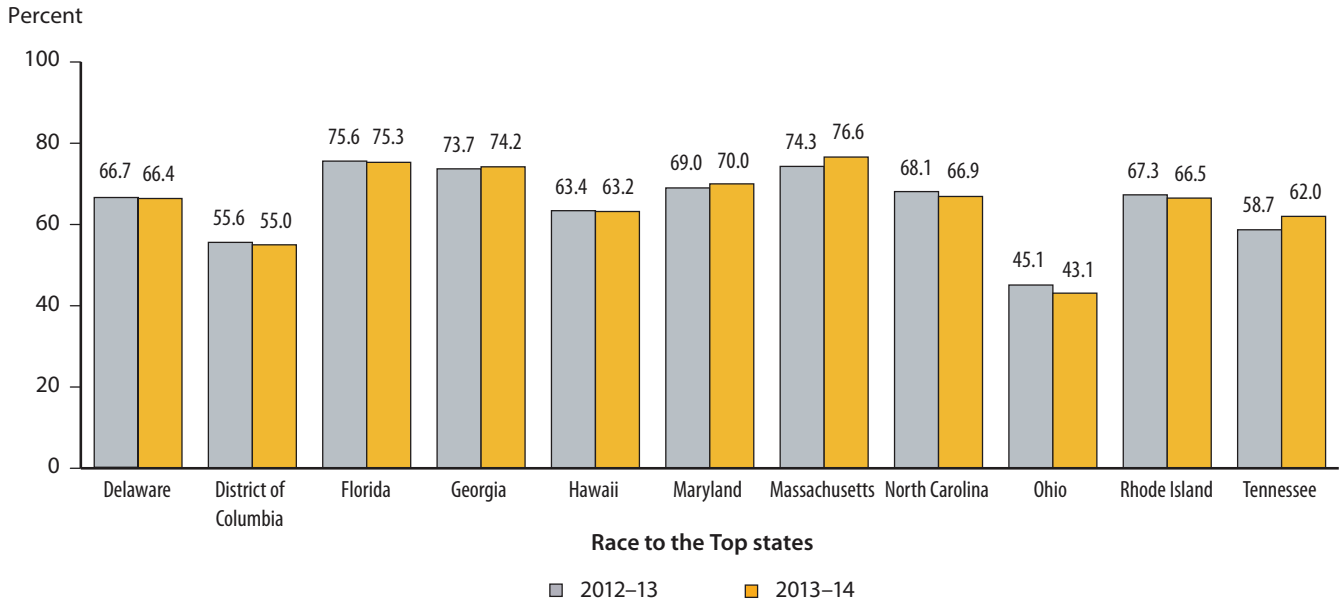
■ 2012–13   ■ 2013–14

Percentage point change in rates of enrollment in institutions of higher education between SY 2012–13 and SY 2013–14

Percent

State	Change
Delaware	-0.3
District of Columbia	-0.6
Florida	-0.3
Georgia	0.5
Hawaii	-0.2
Maryland	1.0
Massachusetts	2.3
North Carolina	-1.3
Ohio	-2.0
Rhode Island	-0.8
Tennessee	3.3

Race to the Top states

Note: New York is excluded due to missing data. Following the release of this report, Delaware updated its 2012–13 school year college enrollment data. ED accepted these updated data, and the charts have been revised accordingly. For more information on these data, see "Data Notes" on page 59.
Source: State submissions to the U.S. Department of Education's ED*Facts* Reporting System.

Impact

Five years later, the state's role in improving teaching and learning has changed fundamentally for the first 12 Race to the Top grantees. State leaders and superintendents forged an unprecedented and wide range of partnerships with principals, teachers, local officials, nonprofits and other stakeholders to support the effective implementation of their state's comprehensive improvement agenda.

Every Race to the Top state made progress toward meeting the goals established in its application. Following are some of the ways 11 states and the District of Columbia — the grantees that received the first and largest Race to the Top grants — lived up to the promise of the goals outlined in their applications.

State capacity to support comprehensive statewide educational improvements

State education agencies (SEAs) as drivers of change. SEAs moved beyond their traditional role of monitoring district compliance to driving comprehensive and systemic changes to improve teaching and learning across the state.

Improved, more collaborative, and productive relationships between states and districts. States worked more collaboratively with districts and increased their own capacity to effectively and efficiently support districts and schools in ways that were responsive to local needs.

Better communication. States improved lines of communication with stakeholders and used a range of tools (e.g., social media platforms) to continuously gather input from teachers, parents, school leaders, stakeholders and the public to determine the additional supports needed to be successful in carrying out their work.

Online Resources to Support College and Career Readiness

engage ny

As of August 2015, **New York**'s EngageNY (www.EngageNY.org) had over 24.2 million visits from 9.4 million users worldwide, for a total of more than 131.7 million page views. The site provides in-depth resources to support teachers implementing college- and career-ready standards at each grade level. The resources include, for example, lesson plans, classroom activities and assessments to monitor student progress. The site also offers videos, newsletters, activities and other resources for families and parents to help them understand the standards and ways to support the education of their children. All of these resources are available free and online for teachers, parents and families across the country.

Source: New York State Education Department

College- and career-ready standards and instructional practices

Higher standards. All Race to the Top states recognized the value of adopting higher standards that are similar across states. Each Race to the Top state implemented challenging kindergarten through 12th-grade academic content standards aimed at preparing students for success in college and careers. With improved standards, teachers, students and parents have a clear roadmap for what students need to know and be able to do to be prepared for success.[9]

Teachers support each other to effectively implement higher standards. Teachers worked together to create tools and resources to help them understand the standards and how best to implement them in their classrooms. Hands-on, job-embedded training helped teachers transition to the new content and develop instructional tools, such as sample lesson plans and instructional videos, to translate the standards into effective classroom practices.

Publicly available resources. Teachers and school leaders in Race to the Top states created tens of thousands of resources aligned to college- and career-ready standards, many of which are publicly available at no cost to schools or teachers.

Monitoring student progress during the school year. Every Race to the Top state developed resources and assessment tools that teachers can use in their classrooms to monitor student progress during the school year. Rather than focus on test preparation for the statewide assessment at the end of the school year, nearly all states introduced instructional resources for the classroom that measure higher-order thinking skills, including critical thinking and complex problem-solving.

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[9] A periodic review of the quality of state standards by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute found that state adoptions of new college- and career-ready standards in 2010 were rated "clearly superior" to most states' existing standards. The expert panel evaluated math and reading standards on their content, rigor, clarity and specificity. See Sheila Byrd Carmichael, W. Stephen Wilson, Kathleen Porter-Magee, and Gabrielle Martino, *The State of State Standards — and the Common Core — in 2010* (Washington, D.C.: Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2010), http://edexcellence.net/publications/the-state-of-state-of-standards-and-the-common-core-in-2010.html.
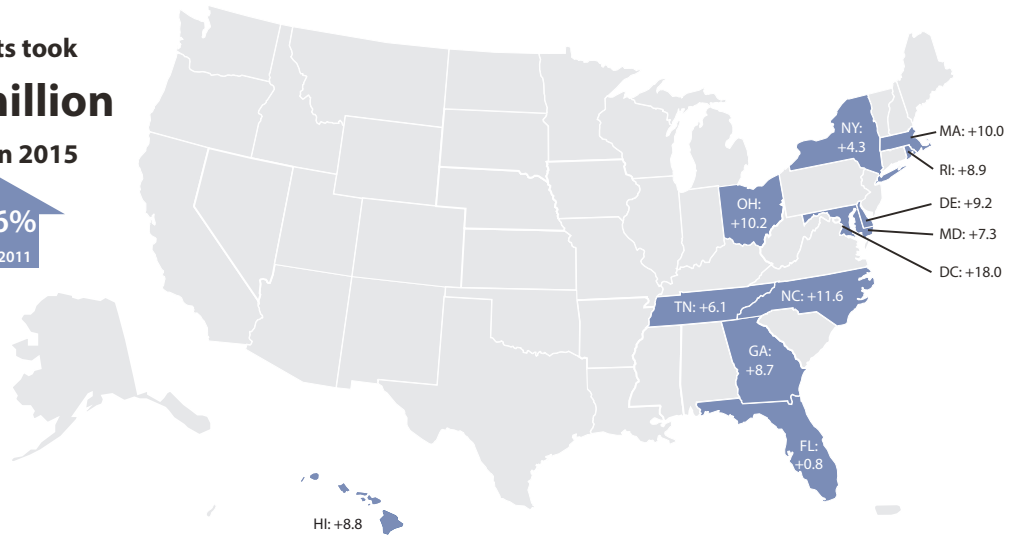
Increased Participation and Success in Advanced Placement Courses

Percentage point increase in students enrolled in AP courses between 2011 and 2015

Students took

1.38 million

exams in 2015

23.6%
SINCE 2011

NY: +4.3
MA: +10.0
RI: +8.9
DE: +9.2
MD: +7.3
DC: +18.0
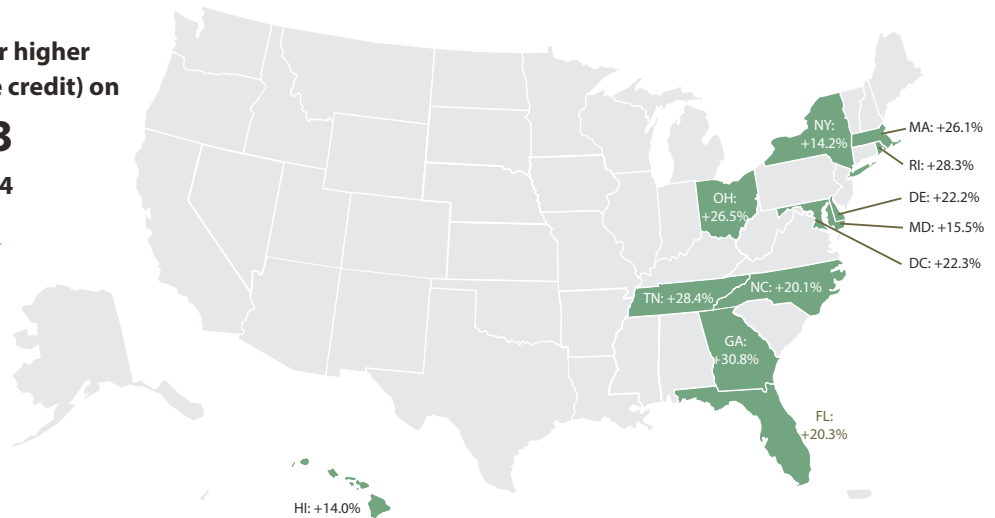OH: +10.2
TN: +6.1
NC: +11.6
GA: +8.7
FL: +0.8
HI: +8.8

Percent increase in AP exam scores of three and above between 2011 and 2014

Students scored 3 or higher
(qualifying for college credit) on

770,973

exams in 2014

20.8%
SINCE 2011

NY: +14.2%
MA: +26.1%
RI: +28.3%
DE: +22.2%
MD: +15.5%
DC: +22.3%
OH: +26.5%
TN: +28.4%
NC: +20.1%
GA: +30.8%
FL: +20.3%
HI: +14.0%

Note: More information about these data can be found on the College Board's website: http://research.collegeboard.org/programs/ap/data. Enrollment data include all subjects and grades 11 and 12. Test score data include all subjects and grades.

Great teachers and leaders

Successes and challenges in developing new evaluation systems for teachers and principals. States and districts are working with teachers and leaders to implement and refine new evaluation and support systems designed to, among other things, provide meaningful feedback to improve teaching and learning — and guide efforts to retain and reward effective teachers and principals.

Teachers and leaders now have more information about expectations for their performance from new systems that describe the competencies and actions of effective teachers and leaders. State and district leaders are getting better at some of the most challenging aspects of implementing new evaluation systems, such as supporting principals to become instructional leaders and working and communicating with teachers to ensure measures of student learning are fair and accurate.

New career pathways for excellent teachers and leaders. In Race to the Top states, excellent teachers and leaders are being identified and offered career advancement opportunities. Teachers who want to remain in the classroom can contribute to their students and colleagues in additional ways, such as mentoring new teachers, earning endorsements to teach a hard-to-staff subject or coordinating school efforts in specialty areas such as technology.

Targeted focus on school and instructional leadership. Principals in Race to the Top states are shifting their role from administrative managers who oversee a range of school functions to instructional leaders who spend the majority of their time helping teachers improve their teaching. Race to the Top states provided principals with training and support to improve their classroom observation skills, as well as their skills in providing meaningful feedback to teachers.

Race to the Top States Provided Innovative and Individualized Professional Development

- The **District of Columbia** designed a professional learning communities program for high-performing schools to lead training for teachers at other schools on instructional approaches to implementing college- and career-ready standards. The program impacted teachers of 15,500 students across charter schools and District of Columbia Public Schools.

- **Delaware** teachers in every school met weekly for 90 minutes in professional learning communities to analyze student work and reflect on ways to modify instruction to bridge gaps identified in student learning.

- **Ohio** districts hired former principals with track records of improving student achievement to coach principals in struggling schools. Coaches bridged the gap between the district and school by providing regular feedback to principals to improve their school leadership skills.

High-quality professional development. Teachers and leaders in Race to the Top states received training and support to improve teaching and learning in their classrooms. States developed high-quality professional development opportunities in multiple formats, such as on-the job coaching, problem-solving sessions with colleagues and online learning modules. Race to the Top states are using professional development opportunities to recruit, retain and grow effective teachers and leaders in high-need schools.

Data systems and technology to improve instruction and support students

High-quality, integrated data systems. Race to the Top states like Georgia, North Carolina and Florida successfully integrated multiple data systems to provide a range of tailored resources and information for different audiences (e.g., teachers, students, parents). In such integrated systems, students can access their assignments, grades and learning activities; parents can view the academic expectations of their child, and his or her school attendance and grades; and teachers and principals can access their students' data and find strategies and resources (e.g., sample lesson plans) to meet their instructional needs.

Access to data and training that help teachers improve instruction to meet their students' needs. Race to the Top states provided extensive training opportunities for teachers to increase their data analysis skills and use student performance data to customize learning for individual students. Teachers are using new data and tools to effectively and quickly check on students' progress and understanding in the course of a single session or over a few weeks.

Twenty-first century classrooms and schools. Some states used their Race to the Top funds to meet local needs for technology devices (e.g., laptops and distance-learning technology) and infrastructure improvements, including high-speed broadband connectivity and access to Wi-Fi networks.

Increased access to and use of objective information on student outcomes. States made critical investments in improving systems to compile student outcome data from pre-kindergarten through the workforce, while protecting personally identifiable information. As outcome data for schools and districts become more accessible to the public, a variety of stakeholders, including parents, policymakers and researchers, will be better able to use these data to answer important questions about educational outcomes, such as "Did students make a year's worth of growth?" and "Are students succeeding, regardless of income, race, ethnicity or disability?"

> **Georgia**, **North Carolina** and **Florida** successfully developed highly integrated technology platforms that pull information from multiple systems to provide teachers with curricula, lesson planning tools, assessment items and much more.

> "Our kids who live in poverty don't have the experiences to put their learning in context. By incorporating technology, their understanding of content becomes much more real."
>
> — **Hawaii** elementary school principal

Creating Networks of Schools and Partnering with Communities

Massachusetts students in wraparound zone schools — schools that incorporate health and social services for students and families — performed better on the state assessment in English/language arts and mathematics than students in other schools with similar achievement trends, particularly third- and fourth-grade students. Students with limited English proficiency demonstrated strong academic results after the third year. Ten of the 15 schools that began providing wraparound services in 2011 improved student outcomes and were no longer listed as low-performing schools at the end of the 2013–14 school year.

Source: American Institutes for Research, "Evaluation of the Wraparound Zones Initiative," submitted to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, June 2015.

Turning around the lowest-performing schools

Local stakeholder engagement. Dramatic improvements in schools require the involvement of community members who understand local contexts and conditions, both inside and outside the school building, to help identify challenges and design solutions. States, districts, teachers, school leaders and community stakeholders are working together to implement strategies to improve the learning environments in their lowest-performing schools and provide services to meet students' academic and nonacademic needs.

New performance management approaches. States are using performance management approaches to help districts support effective interventions in their lowest-performing schools. These approaches help states and districts identify problems, set goals to solve them and use data to track progress.

Creating networks among the lowest-performing schools. States like Tennessee, North Carolina and Massachusetts created networks of their lowest-performing schools that improved supports for teachers and school and district leaders, and resulted in improved student outcomes. Race to the Top states also targeted substantial additional resources and innovative approaches to improve student outcomes in these schools.

The work continues

Americans have always viewed education as the path to a better future. Federal investments in education are based on the premise of equity — equity of opportunity, access and resources. In today's global economy, an individual's education can be directly correlated to the quality of life he or she will live in the future. While federal funding has ended for the first 12 Race to the Top grantees, these states, along with their partners, are continuing their efforts to redesign school systems so that every student has access to a high-quality education and the opportunity to graduate better prepared to make his or her dreams a reality. Flexibility from some of the requirements of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965*, as amended (*ESEA*) allows Race to the Top states to continue the work they began under Race to the Top toward higher standards, supporting their lowest-performing schools, and implementing teacher and principal evaluation and support systems.[10]

The first two phases of Race to the Top produced powerful lessons. Over-whelmingly, state leaders described the push for urgent change under Race

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[10] In September 2011, the Department invited each SEA to request flexibility regarding some specific requirements of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965,* as amended (*ESEA*) in exchange for rigorous and comprehensive state-developed plans designed to improve educational outcomes for all students, close achievement gaps, increase equity and improve the quality of instruction.

> "**Georgia's** Race to the Top application articulated a clear vision for the future of education in our state. Because of the unique level of collaboration and broad spectrum of partners utilized across the state, Georgia has been able not only to sustain our progress, but improve and expand upon it. Students will be reaping the rewards of these reforms for years to come, but there is still much work to be done."
>
> — Governor Nathan Deal, **Georgia**

to the Top as a major accelerator to move forward with bold improvement plans. But that is not to minimize the challenges and difficulties of pursuing ambitious change in such a short time. Many of the individuals who implemented Race to the Top informed this report and noted that their states were not initially well positioned to make rapid changes. State leadership had to build much stronger communication networks with districts and work more collaboratively than was typical in the past. And, as in any innovation effort, some elements posed significant challenges, such as aspects of teacher and leader evaluation systems and improving data systems.

Right now, perhaps the legacy of Race to the Top can best be found in the way that teachers, principals, administrators and others are working more urgently and collectively to solve their most pressing challenges. Teachers are actively seeking the best resources they can find to prepare their students to meet rigorous college- and career-ready standards, and to lead fulfilling lives. Superintendents, school boards and state officials are wrestling with ways to refine their teacher and principal evaluation systems so that they reflect the elements most essential in identifying effectiveness in the classroom. Principals in the lowest-performing schools are working to put in place the right conditions to ensure that their students grow and thrive.

Today and into the future, the country is working toward the goals the President set out to achieve when he first announced the vision for Race to the Top: Better standards. Better teaching. Better schools.

Data Notes

Please note the following when interpreting graduation rate data:

States submit four-year adjusted cohort graduation rates to the U.S. Department of Education's ED*Facts* Reporting System through File Specification 150, Data Group 695 (rates) and File Specification 151, Data Group 696 (cohort counts). Details about the file structure can be found at http://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/edfacts/file-specifications.html.

The four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate is the numer of students who graduate in four years with a regular high school diploma, divided by the number of students who form the adjusted cohort for the graduating class. From the beginning of ninth grade (or the earliest high school grade), students who are entering that grade for the first time form a cohort that is "adjusted" by adding any students who subsequently transfer into the cohort and subtracting any students who subsequently transfer out, emigrate to another country or die.

Data included are the four-year adjusted cohort graduation rates (ACGR). Some states calculate extended rates for accountability purposes, but those rates are not included in the visualization produced for this report.

The following formula provides an example of how the four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate would be calculated for the cohort entering ninth grade for the first time in the 2008–09 school year and graduating by the end of the 2011–12 school year:

$$\frac{\text{Number of cohort members who earned a regular high school diploma by the end of the 2011–12 school year}}{\text{Number of first-time ninth-graders in fall 2008 (starting cohort) plus students who transferred in, minus students who transferred out, emigrated or died during school years 2008–09, 2009–10, 2010–11 and 2011–12}}$$

Although the regulatory adjusted cohort rates are more comparable across states than were rates submitted in previous years under the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965*, as amended (*ESEA*), there are still some differences in how states have calculated their rates. These differences include how students are identified for inclusion in certain subgroups, how the beginning of the cohort is defined, whether summer school students are included, graduation requirements, and which diplomas count as a regular high school diploma. This particularly impacts data related to students with disabilities and English learners, since states have flexibility in how they include students in those subgroups for the purpose of graduation rate calculations.

Detailed information on the adjusted cohort graduation rate can be found in the Department's 2008 High School Graduation Rate Non-Regulatory Guidance: http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/hsgrguidance.pdf.

Some states are still making improvements in their data systems and ACGR calculations; as a result, large changes in graduation rates may be a result of those changes, rather than actual improvement or decline.

Please note the following when interpreting data on enrollment in institutions of higher education:

States submit college enrollment data to the U.S. Department of Education's ED*Facts* Reporting System through File Specification 160, Data Group 739. Details about the file structure can be found at http://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/edfacts/file-specifications.html.

College enrollment, as defined by the Department's collection, is "the number of graduates from two years prior to the current school year who enrolled or did not enroll in an IHE within 16 months of receiving a regular high school diploma."

An IHE is an institution of higher education.

Citation for SY 2012–13: http://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/edfacts/eden/non-xml/c160-9-0.doc (page 2).

Citation for SY 2013–14: http://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/edfacts/eden/non-xml/c160-10-0.doc (page 2).

Due to the two-year lag in the definition, the most current data available are on the class of 2012, so there is limited information on this data point since Race to the Top reforms went into effect.

Use caution when comparing IHE enrollment rates and changes. Data collection systems across states vary widely in quality and availability of data. States have varying requirements for what it means to earn a regular high school diploma.

Some states reported low values for the count of students for whom they had no information on postsecondary activities or the count of students who did not enroll in IHEs, possibly due to individual state methods for calculating IHE enrollment rates.