

# RACE SMARTER

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## Race to the Top – Round 2 Issue Briefs

### FLORIDA: Why It Lost and What It Can Do To Win in Round 2

To assist policymakers in Round 2 of the Race to the Top planning process, we – Democrats for Education Reform, Education Equality Project, and Education Reform Now – are publishing a series of “Race Smarter” briefs, based on analysis of Round 1 applications, with the goal of informing states’ efforts to compete successfully for the remaining \$3.4 billion in Race to the Top funds. This memo provides specific analysis for Florida.

#### OVERVIEW

Florida just barely missed a Round 1 grant. The state received 431.4 total points out of a possible 500 – just 12.8 points shy of the “cutoff” score of 444.2.<sup>i</sup> This was the **fourth-highest score** of all 16 finalists.

A decade of school reforms has put Florida at the head of the pack for Race to the Top Round 2. A laser-like focus on the lowest-achieving schools, and the lowest-achieving students in those schools, has boosted student achievement on both state tests and the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and narrowed achievement gaps. Florida has one of the best data systems in the nation, which it has used strategically to inform its school reform efforts. Florida is also a pioneer in both distance learning and dual high school-college enrollment, both of which have boosted the quality of course offerings for students, increased student and parental choice, and resulted in significant cost savings.

As a result, Florida was deemed a “state leader” according to reviewers’ ratings in both Standards and Assessments (69 out of a possible 70 points) and General (53.8 out of a possible 55 points) categories.

In contrast, Florida lost 29.4 points on Great Teachers and Leaders. This category was the one in which the state lost the most points in absolute terms as well as the one in which it fared least well as compared to other states. Florida’s score of 108.6 in this category put it behind 11 other states. Florida’s proposal included some notable components, such as basing teacher evaluations at least 50% on student learning gains and eliminating “last hired, first fired” policies, but state-wide implementation would have been weak and spotty.<sup>ii</sup> For example, Florida lost seven points for its plans to equitably distribute qualified and effective teachers—almost one-third of the total possible points.

#### ROUND 1 SUMMARY

Although the second round clearly will create a whole new scoring context, Round 1 results are the best available means to inform what Florida needs to do to compete successfully in Round 2. Below is a table summarizing reviewer results for Florida.

SELECTION CRITERIA	POSSIBLE POINTS	POINTS GIVEN FLORIDA	NET LOSS	BEST IN CLASS
A. State Success Factors	125	100.4	24.6	Delaware (119.4) Kentucky (113.6)
B. Standards and Assessments	70	69	1	Ohio (69.4) <b>Florida (69.0)</b>
C. Data Systems	47	40.8	6.2	Delaware (47) Tennessee (43.6)
D. Great Teachers and Leaders	138	108.6	29.4	Louisiana (122.2) Rhode Island (121.2)
E. Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools	50	43.8	6.2	Washington, DC (50.0) Illinois (49.4) Tennessee (48.0)
F. General	55	53.8	1.2	Washington, DC (54.8) <b>Florida (53.8)</b>
G. STEM	15	15	0	Only DC and LA did not receive full points (15) in this category.
Total	500	431.4	68.6	

\* DE had the highest score, with 454.6 points; TN, the other state to be awarded funds, received 444.2 points.

A bill to address these shortcomings was passed by the Florida legislature, but was vetoed by Governor Crist. The veto, and the debate across the weeks leading up to the Round 2 application deadline, are likely to highlight to an even greater extent the weaknesses in the state's plan and make it more difficult to implement necessary improvements to secure a Round 2 award. The fact that the veto seems to have much more to do with the politics of the Republican primary for Florida's U.S. Senate seat than with the substance of the policies proposed (Crist supported the bill when it was originally proposed), may make resolution doubly difficult.

## SELECT REVIEWER COMMENTS

### State Success Factors

Florida must set more ambitious student growth targets and make a stronger case that its reforms, despite resistance from some LEAs and local teachers unions, can – and will – have significant impact on student achievement across the state. It must also step up its goals for narrowing achievement gaps, an area in which the state has demonstrated success in the past several years on both its own tests and NAEP.

**Reviewer 1:** “With such small growth targets projected during the period of the RTTT [Race to the Top] grant, the large amount of resources requested do not adequately match the return the results. The targets for decreasing the achievement gap over the next 4 years are commendable from the perspective projected gains for subgroups, however, the growth expectations for white students at such a minimal level...are of concern and disproportionate by comparison.”

**Reviewer 2:** “Florida has secured the support of a wide spectrum and compelling array of critical stakeholders: policy makers and policy making bodies, business and industry associations, and leadership, civic, civil rights, and community-associations and organizations from across the state.”

**Reviewer 3:** “It does not earn full points because it sets the bar too low, particularly for its white students. For example, FL wants to take fourteen years to raise the percentage of white students scoring basic on grade 4 NAEP reading from 81% to 85%. It is closing its achievement gap, in part, by letting the top flounder.”

### Data Systems To Support Student Instruction

Florida needs to increase transparency, availability, and presentation of state data.

**Reviewer 2:** “The data are not consistently available across all sources and [the data] comes in different formats depending on the source.”

**Reviewer 4:** “FDOE proposes to develop customer friendly, front-end systems that are easy for students, teachers, parents and principals to use....That necessary interface does not exist and the proposal did not provide sufficient information to make a judgment as to its quality. Three of six points given.”

### Great Teachers and Leaders

Florida should develop a clearer plan concerning how accountability for teacher and principal preparation programs will impact the expansion of high-quality programs. It should also ramp-up its goals for equalizing the distribution of highly qualified and effective teachers.

**Reviewer 1:** "The application does not adequately address using student growth as the measure of [teacher] effectiveness."

**Reviewer 2:** "Florida has a system that enables it to measure student growth (Learning Gains) annually using state assessment data and connect students' results with teachers and the courses students take. However, this system is not used by many districts in the state."

**Reviewer 3:** “FL has made significant gains in the area of equitable distribution....Still FL has determined that teacher effectiveness (effectiveness as opposed to qualifications) in high-poverty schools is only half of that of low-poverty schools.”

**Reviewer 5:** On teacher and principal preparation: “It is not clear how these efforts will truly expand preparation programs that are effective in producing student achievement and student growth. Beyond linking the impact of graduates on student growth, it is not clear that these programs will change their practices.”

**Reviewer 5:** "Florida does not earn full points in this section because their targets of ensuring there are effective teachers in high-poverty and high-minority schools and subject areas in the coming years do not appear to be very ambitious."

*Note: All state applications, scores, and comments can be found here: [www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/phase1-applications/index.html](http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/phase1-applications/index.html)*

<sup>i</sup> DE had the highest score, with 454.6 points; TN, the other state to be awarded funds, received 444.2 points.

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.nctq.org/p/publications/reports.jsp>

## DEMOCRATS for EDUCATION REFORM

Democrats for Education Reform (DFER) is a political action committee whose mission is to encourage a more productive dialogue within the Democratic Party on the need to fundamentally reform American public education. DFER operates on all levels of government to educate elected officials and support reform-minded candidates for public office.  
[www.dfer.org](http://www.dfer.org)

## EDUCATION EQUALITY PROJECT

The Education Equality Project (EEP) is leading a civil rights movement to eliminate the racial and ethnic achievement gap in public education. EEP is a national, bipartisan advocacy group of elected officials, civil rights leaders, and education reformers working to bring equity to our public education system.  
[www.edequality.org](http://www.edequality.org)  
[www.twitter.com/EdEquality](https://twitter.com/EdEquality)

## EDUCATION REF★RM NOW

Education Reform Now is a national education policy and advocacy non-profit organization fighting to dramatically improve the quality of public education for America's most disadvantaged children.  
[www.edreformnow.org](http://www.edreformnow.org)