



Race to the Top

"Education's Moon Shot"

Round 2

Race to the Top (RTTT) is an unprecedented \$4.35 billion competitive grant program to support states committed to raising student achievement and closing achievement gaps. Although Massachusetts was a finalist in Phase 1, only two states – Tennessee and Delaware – won awards from the largest discretionary education fund in history. In Phase 2, Massachusetts tightened its process goals and focused on measurable outcomes in the four education policy priorities set by the federal Department of Education:

- **Standards and Assessments** - Adopting international benchmarked standards and assessments that prepare students for success in college and the workplace;
- **Data Systems to Support Instruction** - Building data systems that measure student success and improve educational practices;
- **Great Teachers and Leaders** - Recruiting, developing, retaining, and rewarding effective teachers and principals;
- **Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools** – closing achievement gaps.

State Success Factors

The first section of the application provides an overview of Massachusetts' history of successful standards-based reforms, current challenges, and an overarching vision for how Race to the Top funding will drive innovation and improvement in the Commonwealth. 276 districts and charter schools have signed Memoranda of Understanding required to participate in the state's Race to the Top programs. At least half of the \$250 million in federal funding that the application seeks will be shared with participating districts. To show its commitment to education reform, Massachusetts' application commits the state to implementing its full Race to the Top agenda, *even without funding*. Further, Massachusetts sets a high bar for the success of its program by promising a 25% reduction in gaps in achievement test scores between 2010 and 2014 while maintaining the state's "first-in-the-nation" standing on all four National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) tests.

Standards and Assessments

This section discusses current efforts to develop internationally benchmarked standards and assessments, including Massachusetts' participation in multistate standards and assessment consortia such as the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI) and the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC). Massachusetts outlines plans for statewide integration of the Common Core State Standards based on comparative analysis and state augmentation, following its vote for adoption in July 2010. Massachusetts also plans to create an advanced PreK-12 teaching and learning system that will be used to disseminate Common Core materials, provide educators with access to model teaching materials, various assessments, and real-time data analysis of their students' performance. In-person and online training and professional development will be offered by the state to help educators take full advantage of the new system. Lastly, the state will advance multiple initiatives to maximize the impact of proven college and career readiness programs including: transitioning to MassCore as the default curriculum in the Commonwealth, increasing the number of students taking AP classes, and creating six new Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Early College High Schools.

Data Systems to Support Instruction

As part of the requirements for the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund and other reform efforts, Massachusetts has already begun a comprehensive program for collecting, evaluating, and disseminating data on school, teacher, and student performance. Massachusetts plans to

expand that data system, increase access to the system for teachers and researchers, and offer additional professional development for educators to maximize the benefits of increased data use. The state intends to both improve the availability and customization of education data reports and train teachers in data use and analysis. To ensure high quality data on which high-stakes education decisions can rely, the state plans to institute an enhanced audit system, above and beyond the quality controls currently in place. Creation of the PreK-12 teaching and learning system, mentioned above, will include a “test builder” program that would generate subject assessments and return test results to teachers within 72 hours, enabling educators to adjust and personalize teaching methods to advance student performance.

Great Teachers and Leaders

In an area where the state lost points in Phase 1, Massachusetts put forth a more focused and results-oriented list of strategies in its Phase 2 application: measuring teacher and principal effectiveness, distributing effective teachers and principals equitably amongst schools, and providing educators with improved training and support. The state has created a Task Force on Evaluation of Teachers and Administrators to recommend a comprehensive evaluation framework that will incorporate student performance data and other measures. This work will ground a transition to a multi-tiered license system that will be based on job performance and will support multiple career paths for educators. To address both the need for equitable placement of teachers in high need schools and to further its efforts to turnaround the lowest-achieving schools, the state intends to create a “turnaround corps” composed of effective teachers and leaders specialists in school turnaround. Additionally, the state plans to increase both the supply and retention of effective teachers through a variety of recruitment initiatives and enhanced professional development.

Turning Around the Lowest Achieving Schools

The guidelines for Race to the Top are explicit regarding the options for intervention in low achieving schools: close the school and send students to neighboring public schools; restart the school as a charter school; remove the principal, 50% of staff, and give the incoming principal increased flexibility to improve student performance; or, replace the principal and institute a wide-ranging list of specific initiatives around professional development, increased learning time, instruction reform, and greater operational flexibility. Massachusetts, in this section, commits to implementing these intervention models across 35 schools and describes the programs that will support state turnaround efforts. The state will use its new Framework for District Accountability and Assistance to identify the lowest achieving schools, deploy the “turnaround corps,” in cohorts to schools in need, and select school turnaround partners whose programs have a track record of improving student achievement to provide expanded learning opportunities and social, emotional, and health support. The state will also fund additional pilots of an Early Warning Indicator System capable of identifying potential dropouts early enough to provide support and alternatives.

MBAE supports the objectives of the state’s Race to the Top plan and the renewed focus on outcomes in the Phase 2 application. Throughout the process MBAE has encouraged the state to take bold and aggressive action to close achievement gaps. MBAE has participated in working groups, review teams, and organized meetings between business representatives and education officials. MBAE is a member of the Task Force on Evaluation of Teachers and Administrators and will bring business expertise in talent management to the development of new educator evaluations and compensation models. MBAE is eager to work with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to ensure all students receive a high quality education and graduate ready for college, career and citizenship.