

Washington's Reform Challenge: If We Aren't Racing to the Top, Where are We Going?

With a total of 290.6 points out of a possible 500, Washington state ranked 32nd out of 36 applicants in round two of Race to the Top. Scoring better than only Alabama, Maine, Mississippi and Montana, Washington's application struggled to present a strong education reform platform, strategic plan and willingness to make the legislative changes necessary to support critical reforms. While Washington fared well in its application in the categories of data systems, turning around the lowest performing schools and emphasizing improvement in STEM subjects, without provisions that maintain high standards and assessments, authorize high-quality charter schools and allow student achievement data to be tied to an educator's evaluation, Washington will continue to play catch-up in the race to accelerate student performance.

There is much to be learned from the twelve winning Race to the Top states, and reviewers' comments and feedback on Washington's application indicate that much work remains to be done in order to improve our education system. As Washington state moves forward with finalizing its Education Reform Plan, it is imperative that state leaders thoughtfully incorporate the feedback from Washington's Race to the Top application.

Selected Comments and Feedback from Reviewers of Washington's RTTT Application

RTTT Assurance Area	Points Received	Points Available (out of 500)	Selected Reviewer Comments
State Success Factors	73.4	125	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Participation by 69% of applicable local teacher's union leadership does not reflect a high level of commitment to statewide reform" (Technical Reviewer #4550WA-6, p. 1) • "The terms and conditions in the State's "Partnership Agreement" which was substituted by the State for a Memorandum of Understanding [includes a] Collective Bargaining clause [that] could result in any participating LEA that could not successfully bargain with its local union to implement any aspect of the plan to not implement that aspect but remain in compliance with the Agreement as a whole" (Technical Reviewer #4550WA-10, p. 2). • "The application does not provide a description of the strategies undertaken to reduce [the achievement] gap beyond stressing [it] as a priority for the State" (Technical Reviewer #4550WA-6, p. 4) • "Question the ability of Washington to implement rapid reform to address identified needs of youth in the state" (Technical Reviewer #4550WA-7, p. 1)
Standards and Assessments	47.6	70	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "The purpose of RTTT funding is for swift reform of

			<p>education programs and system... and the state is not planning to implement the standards and assessments until at least the 2013-14 or 2014-15 school years” (Technical Reviewer #4550WA-7, p. 7).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Given that the legislature could refuse to adopt or could modify the standards and given that adoption is delayed beyond 2010, the approach does not meet the applicable requirements under RTTT” (Technical Reviewer #4550WA-10, p. 5). • “The State has engaged in the Smarter Balance Assessment Consortium” (Technical Reviewer #4550WA-4, p. 4).
Data Systems	41.8	47	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The State provides information indicating that its statewide longitudinal data system include all of the America COMPETES Act elements” (Technical Reviewer #4550WA-10, p. 7). • “Ultimately, the applicant did not provide a comprehensive plan for ensuring that data gathered from the enhanced [data system] would be accessible to, and used to inform and engage, key stakeholders, nor that data would support decision-makers in the continuous improvement in areas identified by the RTTT requirements” (Technical Reviewer #4550WA-7, p. 8). • “The State improved upon their longitudinal data management system and introduced CEDARS, [which] captures PK-Grade 12 enrollment, demographic and program participation data as well as student and teacher schedules, high school course grades, and more extensive program participation data” (Technical Reviewer #4550WA-4, p. 5).
Great Teachers and Leaders	59	138	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The plan falls short, overall, in explaining how Washington would increase the supply and availability of effective teachers” (Technical Reviewer #4550WA-6, p. 8). • “The application fails to provide specific detail with regard to how data will be used to specifically drive the professional development delivered in the State” (Technical Reviewer #4550WA-6, p. 9). • “The applicant does not provide a clear and unequivocal statement that student growth for students, classes, and schools data will be included in the evaluation feedback to teachers and principals” (Technical Reviewer #4550WA-7, p. 12).
Turning Around Low-Performing	42	50	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The application presents a comprehensive plan for identifying the State’s persistently lowest-achieving

Schools			<p>schools including evidence that this process is currently in use as of December 2010” (Technical Reviewer #4550WA-6, p. 9).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The State has a detailed plan for the supports needed to change the climate and culture in low-performing schools so that instructional success is the main focus with supplemental strategies supporting the goal of ambitious student achievement” (Technical Reviewer #4550WA-4, p. 14). • “The State provides a detailed plan and timeline for supporting its LEAs in turning around the state’s lowest-achieving schools” (Technical Reviewer #4550WA-5, p. 10).
General Criteria (School Funding & Charter Schools)	11.8	55	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The applicant reports the percentage of total revenues available to the State that were dedicated to education increased from 44.2% in 2008 to 45.4% in 2009, which represents an actual increase in total funding” (Technical Reviewer #4550WA-7, p. 17). • “Washington has not approved legislation to support and or fund charter schools. Throughout the proposal, the State has talked about alternative schools to serve very high at risk youth. No direction mention was made about expanding these schools” (Technical Reviewer #4550WA-4, p. 15).
<i>Optional Criteria:</i> STEM	15	15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The State presents a consistently strong presentation of increasing Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) curriculum. The State has presented a plan that includes support from the state STEM Center to assist with a consistent and sustainable approach to the integration of STEM and the ancillary supports necessary for rigorous instruction” (Technical Reviewer #4550WA-4, p. 16). • “[The State] has set forth plans to integrate STEM content areas across grades and disciplines” (Technical Reviewer #4550WA-5, p. 12).
TOTAL	290.6	500	