RACE TO THE TOP
States Implementing Teacher and Principal Evaluation Systems despite Challenges

What GAO Found

By school year 2012-13, 6 of 12 Race to The Top (RTT) states fully implemented their evaluation systems (i.e., for all teachers and principals in all RTT districts). However, their success in fully implementing by the date targeted in their RTT applications varied. Three of these states met their target date while three did not for various reasons, such as needing more time to develop student academic growth measures. The six states that did not fully implement either piloted or partially implemented. The scope of pilots varied. One state piloted to about 14 percent of teachers and principals while another piloted to about 30 percent. State or district officials in four of the six states expressed some concerns about their readiness for full implementation.

Officials in most RTT states cited challenges related to developing and using evaluation measures, addressing teacher concerns, and building capacity and sustainability. State officials said it was difficult to design and implement rigorous student learning objectives—an alternate measure of student academic growth. In 6 states, officials said they had difficulty ensuring that principals conducted evaluations consistently. Officials in 11 states said teacher concerns about the scale of change, such as the use of student academic growth data and consequences attached to evaluations, challenged state efforts. State and district officials also discussed capacity challenges, such as too few staff or limited staff expertise and prioritizing evaluation reform amid multiple educational initiatives. Officials in 10 states had concerns about sustaining their evaluation systems.

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