

Why GAO Did This Study

In the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, Congress required the U.S. Department of Education (Education) to make education reform grants to states. Education subsequently established the Race to the Top (RTT) grant fund and awarded almost \$4 billion to 12 states related to developing effective teachers and leaders, improving the lowest-achieving schools, expanding student data systems, and enhancing standards and assessments.

This report, prepared in response to a mandate in the act, addresses (1) actions states took to be competitive for RTT grants; (2) how grantees plan to use their grants and whether selected nongrantees have chosen to move forward with their reform plans; (3) what challenges, if any, have affected early implementation of states' reform efforts; and (4) Education's efforts to support and oversee states' use of RTT funds.

GAO analyzed RTT applications for 20 states, interviewed state officials, visited 4 grantee states, analyzed states' planned uses of grant funds, and interviewed Education officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretary of Education (1) facilitate information sharing among grantees on additional promising practices and (2) provide nongrant states with related information. Education agreed with the first recommendation and partially agreed with the second; GAO modified that recommendation to clarify how Education can provide that information to nongrant states.

View [GAO-11-658](#) or key components. For more information, contact George A. Scott at (202) 512-7215 or scottg@gao.gov.

RACE TO THE TOP

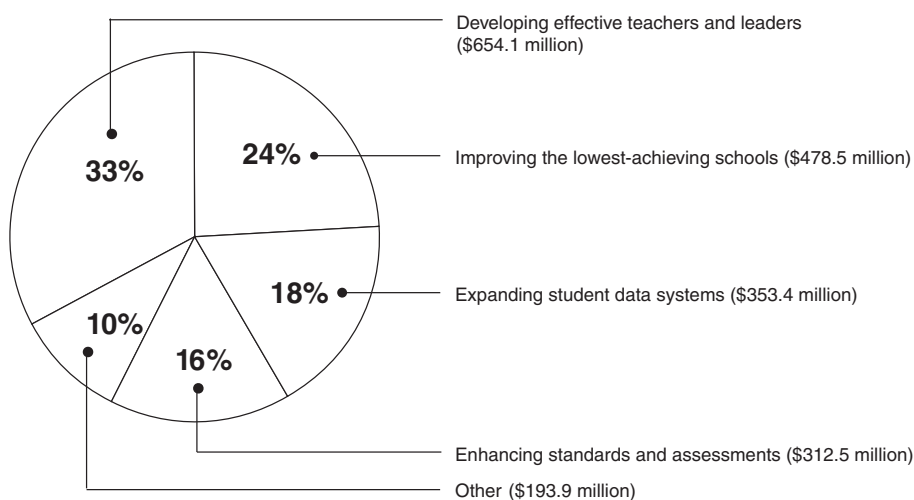
Reform Efforts Are Under Way and Information Sharing Could Be Improved

What GAO Found

State officials GAO interviewed said their states took a variety of actions to be competitive for RTT grants. Of the 20 states GAO interviewed, officials in 6 said their states undertook reforms, such as amending laws related to teacher evaluations, to be competitive for RTT. However, officials from 14 states said their reforms resulted from prior or ongoing efforts and were not made to be more competitive for RTT. While officials in all 20 states told us that applying for RTT took a significant amount of time and effort, several of them also said their state benefited from the planning that the application process required.

Grantees plan to use RTT grant funds to implement reforms in four areas. (See figure.) The largest percentage of state-level RTT funds will be used to increase the effectiveness of teachers and leaders. GAO interviewed officials in 8 nongrant states who said they expect to continue implementing parts of their RTT plans, though at a slower pace than if they had received a grant.

Distribution of States' RTT Grant Budgets, by Reform Area



Source: GAO analysis of states' approved RTT budgets.

Most grantee states have faced a variety of challenges, such as difficulty hiring qualified personnel, that have delayed implementation. As a result, as of June 2011, about 12 percent of first-year grant funds were spent, and some projects were delayed several months. Some state officials said they expect to spend more funds soon and may seek Education's approval to reallocate some first-year grant funds into later years.

Education has provided extensive support to grantee states and has begun monitoring. Education assigned a program officer to each state to assist with implementation and has developed ways for grantees to share information, such as hosting meetings on specific initiatives. Some officials from nongrant states said they would find this information useful, but they were generally unaware of these resources or were unable to access them.