

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-13-777](#), a report to the Chairman, Committee on Education and the Workforce, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Education created RTT under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 to provide incentives for states to reform K-12 education in areas such as improving the lowest performing schools and developing effective teachers and leaders. In 2010, Education awarded 12 states nearly \$4 billion in RTT grant funds to spend over 4 years. A state's RTT application and scope of work included the state's plans for development and implementation of teacher and principal evaluation systems by participating school districts. These systems assess teacher and principal effectiveness based on student academic growth and other measures, such as observation of professional practice. Currently, additional states are designing and implementing similar evaluation systems.

GAO was asked to review RTT teacher and principal evaluation systems. This report examines (1) the extent to which the 2010 grantee states have implemented their teacher and principal evaluation systems, (2) the challenges the grantee states have faced in designing and implementing these systems, and (3) how Education has helped grantee states meet their RTT objectives for teacher and principal evaluation systems.

GAO reviewed relevant federal laws, regulations, and guidance; analyzed RTT applications and documentation on each state's guidelines for their evaluation systems; and interviewed officials from all 12 states, selected districts, and Education.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is not making recommendations in this report.

View [GAO-13-777](#). For more information, contact George Scott at (202) 512-7215 or scottg@gao.gov.

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 of teachers. State or district officials in four of the six states expressed some concerns about their readiness for full implementation.

Implementation status of evaluation systems in school year 2012-13	Delaware	District of Columbia	Florida	Georgia	Hawaii	Maryland	Massachusetts	New York	North Carolina	Ohio	Rhode Island	Tennessee
Teacher evaluations	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	●	○	●	●
Principal evaluations	●	●	●	○	●	○	○	○	●	○	●	●

- Full implementation by all RTT districts
- Pilot or partial implementation

Source: GAO analysis.

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.

Education helps RTT states meet their goals for teacher and principal evaluation systems through a new monitoring process and through technical assistance. Education officials said the RTT monitoring process differs from other monitoring efforts in the frequency of contact with the states and the emphasis on continuous improvement and quality of RTT reforms. Officials from 8 of the 12 RTT states expressed generally positive views about Education's monitoring. When states have not demonstrated adequate progress, Education has taken corrective action. For example, Education designated two states as high-risk, which resulted in additional monitoring. Education provides technical assistance through a contractor; officials from 10 RTT states told us assistance related to evaluation systems was generally helpful. Education officials said they plan to provide RTT and nongranter states with more information to support their efforts.