

Colorado's Race to the Top and the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA): Great Teachers and Leaders

Section I: Overview

On Feb. 17, 2009 President Obama enacted the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. This legislation was primarily designed to stimulate the economy through federal investments in critical state services such as transportation, health care, renewable energy, critical government services, and education. These funds were and remain critically important to the provision of government services. However, it is important to keep in mind that the Recovery Act is as much about reform and renewal as it is about providing a financial safety net.

The Recovery Act contains a variety of reform oriented initiatives. The education reforms are expressed in the form of four state-level assurances: ¹

- To improve the collection and use of data through longitudinal data systems;
- To enhance the quality of standards and assessments;
- To provide support for chronically low performing schools; and
- To achieve equity in the distribution of highly effective teachers and leaders.

Though every state in the nation is required to pursue the above-mentioned assurances as a condition of receiving State Fiscal Stabilization Funds (the primary source of education funds in the Recovery Act), an additional \$4.35 billion was earmarked by Congress for the purpose of establishing an unprecedented national competition among states that show promise in successfully implementing the Recovery Act's assurances. This competition has been called Race to the Top.

On July 24, 2009, the U.S. Department of Education issued notice of proposed priorities, requirements, and selection criteria for the Race to the Top and solicited public comment to those. In October 2009, the U.S. Department of Education will issue the official Race to the Top Request for Proposals. In the first of a two-phase sequence, all eligible and interested states will submit proposals to the U.S. Department of Education. These will be due by the end of 2009. Phase I awards will be announced in March 2010. States may also apply in Phase II which opens in mid-late spring 2010. A copy of the

priorities, requirements, and selection criteria, including information on how to submit comments is available online at <http://www.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/index.html>.

Colorado will submit a proposal for the Race to the Top competition in Phase I.

In the coming months, the Ritter Administration, by way of Lt. Governor O'Brien's office, will join the Colorado Department of Education and the Colorado Department of Higher Education to facilitate a series of statewide conversations regarding the Colorado Race to the Top proposal. This process will culminate in the delivery of recommendations to Governor Ritter who – in conjunction with the State Commissioner of Education Dwight Jones and the State Board of Education – will prepare and submit the Colorado application for Race to the Top funding.

This paper provides a common starting point for conversations that will take place regarding the preparation of Colorado's Race to the Top proposal. In other words, it represents a point of departure for the impending statewide discussions and not the conclusion of a previously determined outcome.

This paper provides background and explains progress Colorado has made in this area and the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. It also illustrates that Colorado's reform agenda closely matches the agenda that is outlined in the Recovery Act for the country at large. Finally, it is intended to help participants in the Race to the Top effort in Colorado consider how Race to the Top funds could help accelerate the state's progress toward realizing the goals for improved student achievement that are embedded in the teacher effectiveness assurance.

American Recovery and Reinvestment Act Assurance: Improving Teacher Effectiveness

The State will take actions to improve teacher effectiveness and comply with section 1111(b)(8)(C) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in order to address inequities in the distribution of highly qualified teachers between high- and low-poverty schools, and to ensure that low-income and minority children are not taught at higher rates than other children by inexperienced, unqualified, or out-of-field teachers. ²

Proposed Priorities, Requirements and Selection Criteria for the Race to the Top Proposal

The proposed guidelines published on July 24, 2009 state that, with respect to each assurance, the State will need to demonstrate compliance with certain “State Reform Conditions Criteria” (evidence of progress made to date) as well as include certain “Reform Plan Criteria” (the components of the reform efforts proposed to be implemented as a result of a grant award). Following is a summary of those criteria. It is important to remember that components of the criteria, as well as their structure, may change substantially before the final proposal is published.

Central to the “Great Teachers and Leaders” selection criteria is the concept of teacher and principal “effectiveness”. The July 24 notice of proposed priorities equates effectiveness with student academic growth. To that end, an “effective teacher” would be one whose students achieve acceptable rates¹ of student growth² and “highly effective” teachers are those whose students demonstrate high rates of student growth. Similar concepts are applied to “effective” and “highly effective” principals, except that academic growth for student sub-groups is also taken into account.

State Reform Conditions Criteria refer to the extent to which a State provides alternative pathways to certification for teachers and principals.

Reform Plan Criteria are used to gauge the extent to which a State has in place a high-quality plan and ambitious but achievable annual targets to accomplish each of the following:

- ❑ Measure student growth, and share that information with teachers, principals, students and their families (student growth criteria);
- ❑ Ensure equitable distribution of effective teachers and principals in high-need schools, and those who teach hard-to-staff subjects (equitable distribution criteria);

¹ “Acceptable rate” of student growth is defined as at least one grade level in an academic year.

² “Student growth” means the change in achievement data for an individual student between two points in time. Growth may be measured by a variety of approaches, but any approach used must be statistically rigorous and based on student achievement data, and may also include other measures of student learning in order to increase the construct validity and generalizability of the information.

- ❑ Link student’s achievement data to the student’s teacher and principal, track that information back to the programs where each of those teachers and principals was credentialed, and publicly report the findings for each credentialing program attended by at least twenty teachers in the state (pre-service criteria);
- ❑ Employ rigorous, transparent and equitable process for differentiating the effectiveness of teachers and principals using multiple rating categories that take into account student growth as a significant factor, provide to each teacher and principal his or her own data and rating, and use this information when making decisions to:
 - Evaluate and develop teachers and principals;
 - Compensate and advance teachers and principals, including additional pay and responsibilities for highly effective teachers; and
 - Tenure and dismiss teachers and principals, including removing those who have not improved despite ample opportunities
- ❑ Provide effective support to teachers and principals by using rapid-time student progress and performance data to inform and guide appropriate support for improving instruction and measure effectiveness and efficiency of supports.

Section II: Background and the National Perspective ³

State laws and regulations touch on every aspect of the teaching profession, yet there is room for improvement in state policy when it comes to determining whether an individual is an effective teacher.

Research shows teacher quality – more than other school-based variables – drives student achievement.

There is much that state policy makers can do to bolster laws/regulations in support of teacher effectiveness:

- ❑ Use longitudinal data systems to provide the evidence needed to assess teacher effectiveness;
- ❑ Require instructional effectiveness to be the preponderant criterion of any teacher evaluation;
- ❑ Provide support – but not indefinitely – to teachers who receive negative evaluations;
- ❑ Ensure that tenure decisions are meaningful;

- ❑ Close loopholes that allow teachers who have not met licensure requirements to teach; and
- ❑ Hold teacher preparation programs accountable for the quality of their graduates.

Ensuring that every classroom has an effective teacher is one of best strategies that states can employ to address the central aim of schooling. That is to improve overall student achievement while closing achievement gaps. Attention to this issue has increased recently. The release of ARRA guidance concerning teacher effectiveness has further magnified attention to this issue. For states to receive ARRA funds, states must provide certain assurances related to their efforts to promote teacher effectiveness.

The research is clear on the difference an effective teacher makes. Researchers Sanders and Rivers analyzed student performance using value-added data from the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System. They found that an 8-year old student at the 50th percentile with consistently effective teachers – those in the top 20 percent – was likely to be at the 90th percentile three years later. In comparison, a similar low-performing student with consistently ineffective teachers – those in the bottom 20 percent – was likely to be in the 37th percentile three years later. That is a difference of 53 percentile points between students with the same starting point, based on the quality of their teachers.⁴

Despite a plethora of teacher policies touching upon every aspect of the teaching profession, there is room for improvement in state policy when it comes to actually determining whether or not an individual is an effective teacher. This brief offers strategies states can consider for bolstering their laws and regulations in support of teacher effectiveness. These strategies are based on analyses of states' teacher policies included in the National Council on Teacher Quality's 2008 State Teacher Policy Yearbook.⁵

Strategies to consider

When addressing teacher effectiveness states may want to consider:

- ❑ Use the state data system to provide some of the evidence needed to assess teacher effectiveness. A teacher is effective if he or she has a positive impact on student learning. While

there are many ways – both objective and subjective – to measure student learning, a comprehensive state data system should provide value-added data that can be considered among the criteria used to determine teachers' effectiveness. Nineteen states have a data system with this capacity, but only two use value-added data to assess teacher effectiveness.

- ❑ Structure teacher evaluations so that instructional effectiveness is the preponderant criterion. Nearly all states set at least rudimentary requirements about the content and frequency of teacher evaluations. Unfortunately, these guidelines allow for too many evaluation instruments – some developed at the local level, others by states – that are structured so that teachers can earn a satisfactory rating without any evidence that they are sufficiently advancing student learning in the classroom. Many evaluation instruments give as much weight, sometimes even more weight, to factors that do not have any correlation with student performance, such as taking professional development courses or sponsoring an extracurricular activity. Evaluation instruments should include objective evidence of student learning, which need not be limited to standardized test scores, as well as factors such as classroom observations that require human judgment.⁶ Only four states require evidence of student learning to be the preponderant criteria in teacher evaluations. Just 15 states require any objective measures of student learning. Twenty-two states do not even require that teacher evaluations include classroom observations.

- ❑ Provide support – but not indefinitely – to teachers who receive negative evaluations. Teacher evaluations are too often treated as mere formalities, rather than as important tools for rewarding good teachers, helping average teachers to further develop their skills, and holding weak teachers accountable for poor performance. State policy can send an important message to districts and schools about the importance of evaluations so that teachers and principals alike take their consequences seriously. Accordingly, state policy can articulate that teachers who receive negative evaluations should be placed on improvement plans. These teachers should receive support and additional training; however, opportunities to improve should not be unlimited. Just 26 states require that teachers who receive even one unsatisfactory evaluation are placed on an improvement plan. Only 13 states specify that teachers who have been rated unsatisfactory on multiple evaluations should be eligible for dismissal.

- ❑ Base tenure decisions on evidence of teacher performance. Most states award teachers tenure after three years or less with no required review of teacher effectiveness. States can require districts to evaluate evidence of effectiveness before awarding tenure. States can also extend the tenure decision to five years in order that sufficient data on a teacher can be accumulated and to make this decision the milestone in a teacher's career that it deserves. A large increase in pay may coincide with the awarding of tenure based on effectiveness. Forty four states allow teachers to earn tenure in three years or less; three states award teachers permanent status after a single year of teaching. Only two states (Iowa and New Mexico) require any evidence of teacher effectiveness to be considered as part of tenure decisions. All other states permit districts to award tenure virtually automatically.

- ❑ Close loopholes that allow teachers who have not met licensure requirements to teach. Licensure tests are meant to ensure that an individual meets the minimum qualifications to be a teacher. While states may need a regulatory basis for filling classroom positions with a small number of people who do not hold full teaching credentials, too many states have loopholes that allow teachers who have not passed licensure tests to remain in the classroom year after year, putting the instructional needs of students at risk. Twenty-two states permit teachers to remain the classroom for three years or more without passing all required licensing tests. Just seven states require teachers to pass all tests before entering the classroom.

- ❑ Hold teacher preparation programs accountable for the quality of their graduates. A major weakness in the teacher quality equation is linked to the fact that most states do little to hold teacher preparation programs accountable for their admissions standards, program content, or, most importantly, the quality of their graduates. Only 17 states require teacher preparation programs to make basic skills testing a condition of admission. Only 18 states collect any meaningful objective data that reflect program effectiveness. States do an even poorer job of holding alternate route preparation programs accountable.

In Colorado, graduates of the state's teacher preparation programs must pass the appropriate PLACE or Praxis II exam (demonstrating competency in Colorado Model Content Standards in

their grade level and content area) before being endorsed for initial licensure by CDE and every teacher preparation program in the state must be initially reviewed and approved by both CDE and DHE. After initial review and approval, each program gets fully reviewed and reauthorized on a 5-7 year cycle. CDE reviews each program to ensure candidates are required to demonstrate proficiency in the eight Performance-Based Standards for Colorado Teachers and additional endorsement standards reflected in the Colorado Educator Licensing Act (C.R.S. 22-60.5). DHE reviews each program for the following statutory performance criteria: admission system; screening and counseling of teacher candidates; integration of theory and practice in coursework and field based training; supervised field based experience (at least 800 hours); and assessment of candidates' subject matter and professional knowledge and ability to apply the professional knowledge base (C.R.S. 23-1-121.2).

Sources of Objective Evidence of Student Learning

Many educators struggle to identify sources of objective student data. Potential sources for evidence of student learning include:

- Standardized test scores
- Periodic diagnostic assessments
- Benchmark assessments that show student growth
- Artifacts of student work connected to specific student learning standards. These can be randomly selected for review by principal or senior faculty and scored using rubrics/descriptors.

Section III: The Colorado Context: Progress on the Promise

This provides an overview of state policies and laws that are designed to improve teacher effectiveness. It also summarizes recent state progress in this area. In a variety of ways, Colorado stands out for the progress it has made toward establishing a policy context that lends itself to innovation in the arena of teacher preparation. For instance,

- HB 08-1388 (School Finance Act) built on a P20 Council recommendation and created a \$1 million teacher alternative compensation grant program.

- ❑ SB 09-160 (Streamlining and Aligning Alternative Teacher and Teacher in Residence Program) aligns existing alternative teacher preparation laws into one comprehensive law. The bill requires the State Board of Education to establish common program quality requirements and minimum coursework standards for both alternative and traditional teacher programs and eliminates unnecessary barriers for career changers. It further extends alternative teacher licensing authority to non-profit organizations.

- ❑ HB 09-1065 (Teacher Identifier Act) directs the Colorado Department of Education to develop an identifier system with the ability to link individual educators to students.

- ❑ SB 09-213 (Alternative Teacher Compensation Act) provides a mechanism that leads to grant programs for the expansion or alternative teacher compensation programs in local districts. Because this broadens the range of available policy levers it helps Colorado address the human capital challenge. This bill was ultimately abandoned as a separate piece off legislation; however, provisions of this bill were incorporated into HB 08-1388 referenced above.

- ❑ HB 08-1386 (School Leadership Academy Program Act) creates a school leadership program to identify, recruit, train and induct qualified persons for leadership positions in public schools.

- ❑ Teach Colorado Grant Initiative (\$500,000 annually), administered by Colorado Department of Higher Education, to attract more candidates into high need content areas like math, science and world languages. (These funds can also be claimed as matching funds in IHEs' federal Teacher Quality Partnership grant applications to increase the overall amount of dollars flowing into Colorado for teacher preparation.)

- ❑ A variety of programs around the state are designed to improve teacher preparation quality including, but not limited to, MSCD's Urban Teacher Partnership; CU-Boulder's CU Teach; and University of Denver's Urban Residency teacher preparation programs work directly with school

districts, such as The Boettcher Teachers Program (with Adams 12 and Mapleton School Districts) and the Denver Residency Program (with Denver Public Schools).

Section IV: Guiding Principles and Related Materials for Race to the Top Subcommittees

Goal for Colorado

Create a highly effective educator workforce through outstanding recruiting and preparation, clear expectations for performance, and tools to support and recognize excellence. This will be accomplished by providing mechanisms that enable: (1) teachers to enter the profession from a variety of backgrounds and experience upon demonstration of competency in critical areas of teacher effectiveness; (2) teachers to receive adequate preparation in core teaching competencies, including mastery of Colorado content standards; (3) systems to generate credible, reliable data on individual teacher effectiveness and make it readily available on an ongoing basis to teachers in a timely manner that facilitates reflection and the improvement of practice; and (4) incentives to exist that attract the most-highly effective teachers to low-performing schools and that promote the instructional effectiveness of those who teach our academically neediest students.

Guiding Questions for Race to the Top Subcommittees

1. How can Race to the Top funds advance this reform vision and accelerate Colorado's efforts to achieve its goal?
2. What data will gauge how we are improving as a system in our efforts to enhance teacher effectiveness?
3. How is attention in this arena addressing the unique needs of our youngest learners?
4. How will changes we propose achieve our dual aims:
 - (a) Enhance the accountability of educators for the success of all students; and
 - (b) Provide new pathways, tools, and support so educators have the means to accomplish ambitious student outcomes?

Resources

Attachment I: Summary of Colorado Law Related to Teacher Quality and Effectiveness

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdegen/downloads/ColoradoLawRelatedtoTeacherLaws.pdf>

Attachment II: *The Widget Effect*, The New Teacher Project

<http://widgeteffect.org/>

Attachment III: *State Teacher Policy Yearbook*, National Council on Teacher Quality

<http://www.nctq.org/stpy08/>

Attachment IV: Summary of HB 09-1065 (Educator ID bill)

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdegen/downloads/HB09-1065EducatorIDbill.pdf>

Attachment V: Recommendations of the Educator Subcommittee of the P-20 Council, Nov. 16, 2008

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdegen/downloads/P-20EducatorSubcommittee.pdf>

Attachment VI: Report to the General Assembly on Teacher Preparation, Colorado Commission on Higher Education, Dec. 2008

http://highered.colorado.gov/Publications/Reports/Legislative/TED/200812_TED_toGGA.pdf

Section V: Race to the Top Committee Contacts

Committee Co-Chairs

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Colorado's Race to the Top

<http://www.colorado.gov/cs/Satellite/LeftLtGov/LLG/Page/1240228831801/1187340344163>

Section VI: Conclusion

Colorado is in a providential position as it begins the process of assembling its proposal for Race to the Top funds. Assurances spelled out in the Recovery Act are directionally consistent with the state's established reform agendas, in particular Governor Ritter's Colorado Promise and The Department of Education's "Forward Thinking" document. More importantly, the state has made noteworthy progress in all of the assurance areas. In other words, the Race to the Top competition provides an unprecedented opportunity for the state to think big while maintaining a clear focus on its existing agenda.

Nonetheless, for Colorado to remain competitive, regardless of whether the state receives Race to the Top funds in the coming year, the communities of the state must collectively embrace the belief that transformational reform is both necessary and possible. To this end, innovation is essential. But innovation is not just change for the sake of change. It must lead to improved processes and results—and, ultimately, dramatic, measurable improvements in student achievement. The courage to move forward and envision a system in which all students realize their own God given potential is our covenant to the future generations of Coloradans.

It's an exciting time. Outcomes of the work taking place in the next five months have the potential to change Colorado's future educational and economic outcomes. Children deserve our best efforts and most innovative thinking, and we welcome all who wish to engage in this process. With the help of the entire Colorado community, we will realize our collective goals while moving boldly into the 21st century.

¹ The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, Title XIV, Section 14006 (Public Law 111-5) at www.ed.gov/programs/racetothe_top/legislation.html

² Ref. 20 U.S.C. 6311(b)(8)(C)

³ Sandi Jacobs, "Teacher Effectiveness" from *A Briefing for the National Governors, Perfecting the Formula Effective Strategies = Educational Success*, June 14-15, 2009, James B. Hunt Jr. Institute for Educational Leadership and Policy, Issue Brief II

⁴ William Sanders and June Rivers, *Cumulative and Residual Effects of Teachers on Future Student Achievement*. (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Valued Added Research and Assessment Center, 1996)

⁵ Individual state analyses can be downloaded from the National Council on Teacher Quality's website at www.nctq.org/stpy

⁶ Although not enough research has been done on the correlation between teacher evaluation ratings and student performance, a few recent investigative reports strongly suggest that teacher evaluations are largely a meaningless process, failing to identify the strongest and weakest teachers. See, for example, The New Teacher Project's report, "Teacher Hiring, Assignment, and Transfer in Chicago Public Schools" (July 2007), and Brian Jacobs and Lars Lefgren, "When Principals Rate Teachers," Education Next, Spring 2006