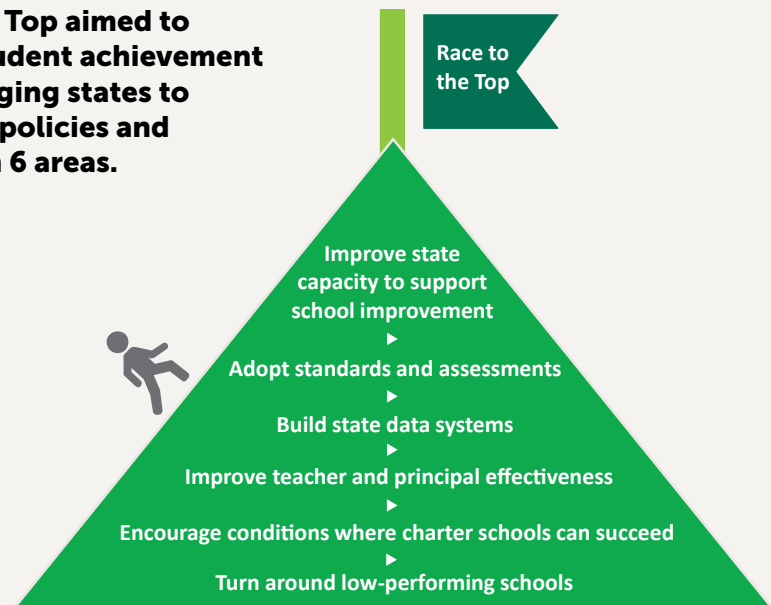# InFOCUS

Lisa Dragoset, Susanne James-Burdumy, Kristin Hallgren, Irma Perez-Johnson, Mariesa Herrmann, Christina Tuttle, and Megan Angus of Mathematica Policy Research; Rebecca Herman, Matthew Murray, Courtney Tanenbaum, and Cheryl Graczewski of American Institutes for Research

Examining States' Use of Policies and Practices Promoted by Race to the Top

The Race to the Top (RTT) program sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education (ED) aimed to improve student outcomes by awarding competitive grants to states that agreed to implement the policies and practices that RTT promoted. The RTT program received $4.35 billion from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 to fund these grants.
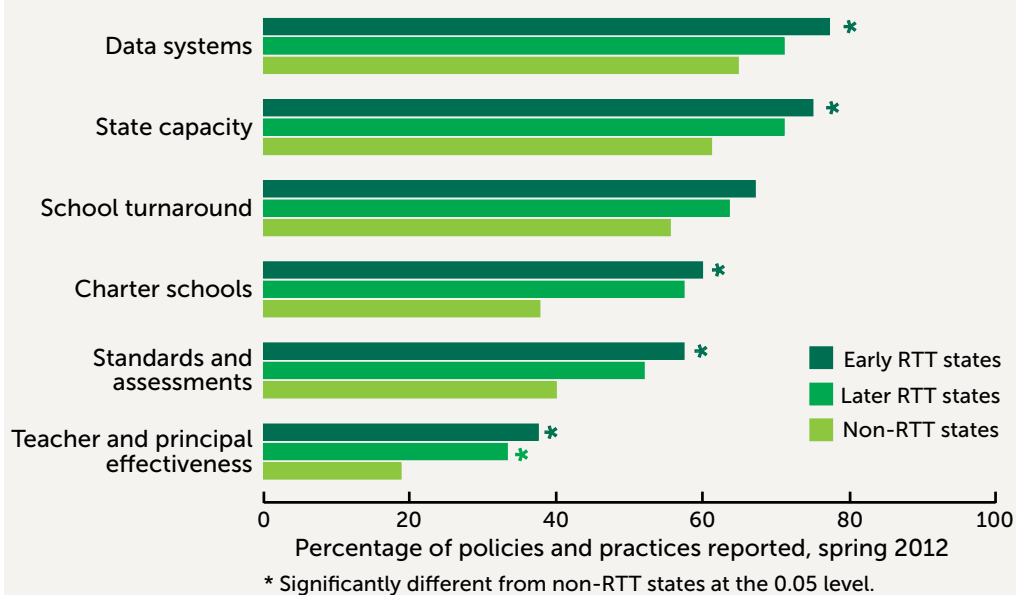

Race to the Top aimed to improve student achievement by encouraging states to implement policies and practices in 6 areas.

Race to the Top

- Improve state capacity to support school improvement
- Adopt standards and assessments
- Build state data systems
- Improve teacher and principal effectiveness
- Encourage conditions where charter schools can succeed
- Turn around low-performing schools

Given the sizeable investment in RTT, it is of policy interest to know (1) if states that received grants are actually using the policies and practices that RTT promoted and (2) if these states are more likely to use them than states that did not receive grants. Comprehensive evidence on these questions has been limited to date.

A new report from Mathematica's multi-year evaluation of RTT for ED's Institute of Education Sciences describes the policies and practices states reported using in spring 2012. The evaluation examines whether early RTT states (which received Round 1 or Round 2 grants in 2010) and later RTT states (which received Round 3 grants in 2011) were more likely to use the policies and practices promoted by RTT than non-RTT states (which did not receive grants).

Early RTT states reported using more RTT-promoted policies and practices than non-RTT states in 5 of 6 areas.

Percentage of policies and practices reported, spring 2012

* Significantly different from non-RTT states at the 0.05 level.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Early RTT states reported using more RTT-promoted policies and practices than non-RTT states in five of six areas:** (1) building state data systems that measure student growth and inform instruction; (2) improving state capacity to support school improvement efforts; (3) encouraging conditions in which charter schools can succeed; (4) adopting standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace; and (5) improving teacher and principal effectiveness.

- **Later RTT states reported using more RTT-promoted policies and practices than non-RTT states in one of the six areas (teacher and principal effectiveness).**

- **Across all states, use of RTT-promoted policies and practices was highest in the state capacity and data systems areas and lowest in the teacher and principal effectiveness area.** On average, states reported using 68 percent of the policies and practices promoted by RTT in the data systems area and 66 percent in the state capacity area. States reported using 24 percent of the policies and practices in the teacher and principal effectiveness area.

- **Across the six areas, there were no differences between RTT and non-RTT states in use of RTT-promoted policies and practices that focused on English language learners (ELLs).** Early RTT states, later RTT states, and non-RTT states reported using, on average, about half of the ELL-focused policies and practices promoted by RTT.

SAMPLE AND METHODS

The analysis was based on structured telephone interviews with representatives from state education agencies from 49 states and the District of Columbia (12 early RTT states, 7 later RTT states, and 31 non-RTT states). The interviews, conducted in spring 2012, collected information about educational policies, practices, and support related to the six areas promoted by RTT.

ABOUT THE REPORT

This report, written by Mathematica and the American Institutes for Research, describes the policies and practices promoted by RTT that states reported using in spring 2012. The full report is available at http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/~/media/publications/pdfs/education/rtt_sig_rpt_rtt.pdf. A future report will update the findings for spring 2013 and examine the relationship between receipt of an RTT grant and student achievement.