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Race to the Top: Implementation and Relationship to Student Outcomes

The Race to the Top (RTT) program sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education (ED) aimed to improve student achievement, including that of high-need students like English Language Learners (ELLs). It received $4.35 billion from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 to award competitive grants to states that agreed to implement the policies and practices it promoted.

The sizable investment in RTT has prompted interest in the program's outcomes. Education policymakers and stakeholders want to know if (1) states that received grants were more likely than states that did not receive grants to use the policies and practices that RTT promoted, (2) grant recipients were more likely than non-grant recipients to use policies and practices that focused on ELLs, and (3) receiving grants was related to increases in student achievement. To date, there has been little comprehensive evidence to answer these questions.

The final report from Mathematica's multiyear evaluation of RTT for ED's Institute of Education Sciences describes the policies and practices states reported using in spring 2013 and student achievement from 2003 through 2015. The evaluation compares outcomes for the 12 early RTT states that received Round 1 or Round 2 grants in 2010, 7 later RTT states that received Round 3 grants in 2011, and 32 non-RTT states that did not receive grants.

Early RTT states received grants in 2010; later RTT states received grants in 2011
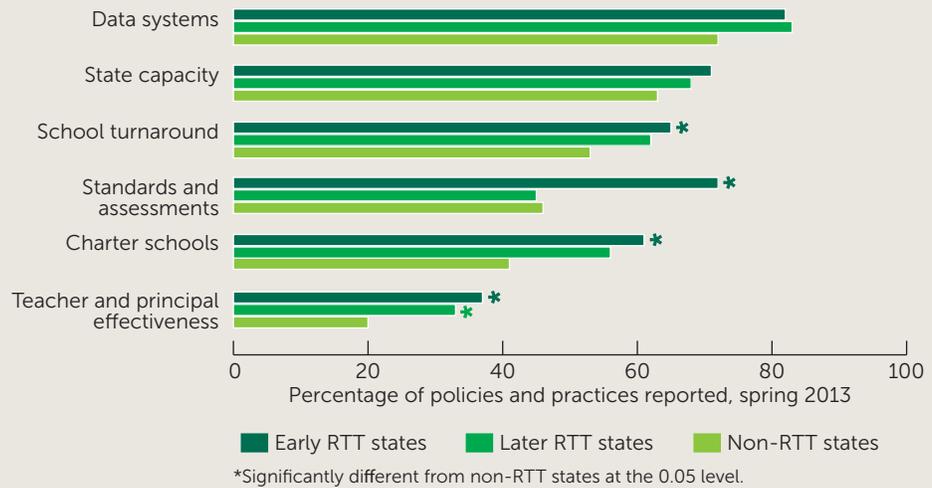
DC

■ Early RTT states ■ Later RTT states ■ Non-RTT states

Early RTT states reported using more RTT-promoted policies and practices than non-RTT states in four of six areas

Data systems

State capacity

School turnaround *

Standards and assessments *

Charter schools *

Teacher and principal effectiveness * *

Percentage of policies and practices reported, spring 2013

0   20   40   60   80   100

■ Early RTT states   ■ Later RTT states   ■ Non-RTT states

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

Later RTT states reported using more RTT-promoted policies and practices than non-RTT states in one of six areas.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Early RTT states reported using more RTT-promoted policies and practices than non-RTT states in four of the six areas that RTT promoted:** (1) turning around low-performing schools, (2) adopting standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace, (3) encouraging conditions in which charter schools can succeed, and (4) improving teacher and principal effectiveness. There were no differences between these two groups in the other two areas—building state data systems that measure student growth and inform instruction, and improving state capacity to support school improvement efforts.

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

- **Across all six areas, early RTT states reported using more ELL-focused policies and practices than non-RTT states.** Later RTT states did not differ from non-RTT states in their use of ELL-focused policies and practices.

- **The effect of RTT on student achievement was not clear.** Different, reasonable interpretations of how student achievement was trending before RTT yield conflicting conclusions.

SAMPLE AND METHODS

The analysis of implementation was based on structured telephone interviews with representatives from state education agencies from 50 states and the District of Columbia. The interviews, conducted in spring 2013, collected information about educational policies, practices, and support related to the six areas that RTT promoted. The analysis of the relationship between RTT and student achievement was a descriptive analysis based on publicly available state-level test scores from the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

ABOUT THE REPORT

The report was written by Lisa Dragoset, Jaime Thomas, Mariesa Herrmann, John Deke, and Susanne James-Burdumy of Mathematica Policy Research; and Cheryl Graczewski, Andrea Boyle, Courtney Tanenbaum, Jessica Giffin, and Rachel Upton of American Institutes for Research. It examines the implementation of RTT-promoted policies and practices in 2013 and the relationship between the receipt of an RTT grant and student achievement. The full report is available at https://www.mathematica-mpr.com/our-publications-and-findings/publications/race-to-the-top-implementation-and-relationship-to-student-outcomes.

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