

# RACE TO THE TOP: A ROAD MAP

When President Barack Obama leaves office in early 2017, the No. 1 phrase that's likely to be associated with his education policy is Race to the Top. The Obama administration took a strategy that had already been tried by others—competitive grants to further favored policies—and put it on steroids. There have been Race to the Top competitions aimed at states and districts, for policies ranging from testing to personalized learning to early-childhood education.

But while the initial windfall—more than \$4 billion in all—generated a lot of interest and applicants, subsequent rounds have gotten a lot less attention and money. The franchise has awarded roughly \$6 billion in federal grants to states and districts and expanded to about a dozen variations, including proposed competitions that still need the congressional seal of approval. And, in recent years, the administration hasn't always been able to sell its Race to the Top vision to Congress. Lawmakers don't necessarily love a program that creates winners and losers, especially if those losers are their constituents.

Here's a one-stop guide to keeping all the various versions of Race to the Top straight. Follow the twists and turns of who has gotten the money so far, and what the grantees are supposed to be doing with it.



## RACE TO THE TOP Classic

**12 winners:**  
Delaware, the District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Rhode Island, and Tennessee

This is the original Race to the Top, the administration's signature education-redesign competition, first created as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (the economic stimulus). To get a piece of a \$4 billion pie, states had to agree to embrace policies the administration favored, including teacher evaluation based in part on student outcomes, beefed-up state data systems, and aggressive school turnarounds. States also got an edge for adopting rigorous, common standards. (In practice, only the Common Core State Standards counted, which got the Obama administration into some major political hot water down the line.)

**START YOUR ENGINES:**  
Obama administration kicks off the race

\$4 billion

Grants awarded in 2010

## RACE TO THE TOP Common Test

The administration took a piece of the first Race to the Top money in the stimulus, and distributed it to two consortia of states charged with creating tests that would match up with the common-core standards. The consortia, called the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, or PARCC, and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, have hit some major roadblocks since then, with a handful of states deciding to quit the groups. And the administration has taken some heat for funding the tests in the first place.

**2 winners:**  
PARCC, Smarter Balanced

Grants awarded in 2010

\$360 million

Runners-up get a second chance

## RACE TO THE TOP Classic (Silver Medal Edition)

Seven non-winning states with high-scoring Race to the Top Classic applications split an additional \$200 million. States got to choose smaller elements of their original proposals to move forward on.

**7 winners:**  
Arizona, Colorado, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania

Grants awarded in 2011

\$200 million

## RACE TO THE TOP Goes to Preschool

States competed for \$500 million to improve the quality of their early-learning programs, in part by crafting rating systems, developing appropriate standards and assessments for children, and establishing state standards for teachers.

**9 winners:**  
California, Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, North Carolina, Ohio, Rhode Island, and Washington state

Grants awarded in 2011

\$500 million

## RACE TO THE TOP Districts: Let's All Try Personalized Learning

Under this round of Race to the Top, districts were required to come up with plans to customize instruction to particular students' abilities and interests, using technology and other tools. Popular strategies included use of mobile devices and individualized learning plans for students, personalized learning coaches for teachers, and data dashboards that collect all student-learning information in one place.

**16 winners, including:**  
Miami; Charleston, S.C.; New Haven, Conn.; and Carson City, Nev.

Grants awarded in 2012

\$400 million

Rural districts have their day

## RACE TO THE TOP Districts: Let's All Try Personalized Learning, Part II (Rural Emphasis Edition)

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan passed over higher-scoring urban districts to give the majority of this round of Race to the Top district awards to rural applicants, which many argued had been overlooked in previous rounds of Race to the Top. Just one of the winners—Houston—was urban. As in the earlier round, winners were expected to "personalize" learning for their students.

**5 winners, including:**  
Houston; Clarendon, S.C.; and Springdale, Ark.

Grants awarded in 2013

\$120 million

## RACE TO THE TOP Goes to Preschool (Silver Medal Edition, Part II)

A year later, the U.S. Department of Education distributed another \$89 million to the Race to the Top Early Learning Competition silver medal winners, plus first-round winner California, which wasn't fully funded initially. Ultimately, each state wound up with about 75 percent of its application funded.

**6 winners:**  
California, Colorado, Illinois, New Mexico, Oregon, and Wisconsin

Grants awarded in 2013

\$89 million

## RACE TO THE TOP Goes to Preschool (Silver Medal Edition, Part I)

States that had strong showings in the initial Race to the Top Early Learning Competition split \$133 million. Since the total was so small, each state received only a portion of its overall request.

**5 winners:**  
Colorado, Illinois, New Mexico, Oregon, and Wisconsin

Grants awarded in 2012

\$133 million

Twists and turns continue

## RACE TO THE TOP For Equity (Plus Teacher Distribution, School Climate, and Everything But the Kitchen Sink)

Under the administration's fiscal 2015 budget proposal, districts and states vying for the grants would have to develop data systems that track information on subjects ranging from district-level finances to human resources and student academic achievement. They would also have to come up with plans for attracting and retaining effective teachers in the neediest schools. Winners could use the grants to help beef up their coursework and to improve school climate and culture.

Congress must first approve the program. Winners would be announced by the end of 2015.

\$300 million proposed

## RACE TO THE TOP Preschool Development Grants

After Congress rejected a new Race to the Top for higher education and a proposed \$75 billion, 10-year federal matching program to expand pre-K to more 4-year-olds, the administration settled simply for new money for early education through Race to the Top. The Education Department hasn't yet said how the new competition would work, only that it will differ from previous early-learning rounds.

Winners (and rules) still to be announced

Grants must be awarded by December 2014

\$250 million

## RACE TO THE TOP Goes to Preschool, Yet Another Time

A total of \$281 million went to six states that had never won a Race to the Top early-learning grant. That brought to 20 the total number of Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge grant winners.

**6 winners:**  
Georgia, Kentucky, Michigan, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Vermont

Grants awarded in December 2013

\$281 million

## RACE TO THE TOP Applies to College, But Is Rejected

The Obama administration proposed \$1 billion for a Race to the Top program to help states improve higher education outcomes, including graduation rates, while keeping tuition in check. Congress wasn't interested.



\$ ZERO  
\$1 billion proposed, but not funded

TOTAL RACE TO THE TOP AWARDS: \$6.3 billion

TOTAL NUMBER OF STATE AGENCIES GRANTED AWARDS: 27\*

\*Excludes assessment consortia and district awards. Includes District of Columbia.

TOTAL NUMBER OF DISTRICTS GRANTED AWARDS: 21