

Presidential Prescriptions for State Policy: Obama's Race to the Top Initiative*

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Abstract

In an era of congressional gridlock and party polarization, presidents regularly rely upon extra-legislative means to advance their policy agenda. Such means, however, are not merely inherited. They also are fabricated anew. In this regard, one of most significant innovations in recent years is President Barack Obama's Race to the Top initiative, which sought to stimulate the adoption of specific education reforms in state governments around the country through a series of highly prescriptive policy competitions. This paper evaluates the results of such efforts. To do so, it draws on three original datasets: one on state applications to the competitions themselves; another on state policy-making trends in a range of education policies that relate, to varying degrees, to the competition; and a third on State of the State speeches. The paper then relies upon a variety of identification strategies to gauge the influence of Race to the Top on the nation's education policy landscape. While precise estimates of the magnitude of its impact prove elusive, taken as a whole the evidence suggests that Race to the Top meaningfully augmented the production of state policies that were central components of the president's education agenda.

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Among political actors, presidents may hold the prize for most entrepreneurial. Facing extraordinary public expectations on the one hand and a relatively modest endowment of constitutional authority on the other, presidents historically have fashioned all sorts of mechanisms by which to advance their policy objectives: through unilateral directives such as executive orders, proclamations, and national security directives, all of which have received a good measure of scholarly attention (for reviews, see Howell 2005 and Mayer 2009); but also through signing statements (Jackman 2014; Kelly, Marshall, and Watts 2013), executive agreements (Martin 2000), memoranda (Woolley 2014), procurement provisions (Gitterman 2013), and distributive outlays (Berry, Burden, and Howell 2010; Kriner and Reeves 2015; Hudak 2013). In each of these ways, presidents have either discovered or manufactured ways to shape public policy outside of the traditional legislative process. And none, it bears emphasizing, find explicit mention in the Constitution.

The proliferation of policy-making tools, however, does not guarantee a significant expansion of presidential power. Unilateral directives are neither as far-reaching nor as durable as legislation (Howell and Lewis 2002). Rather than expanding executive influence, some executive agreements may only satisfy basic governance obligations (Krutz and Peake 2011). And for all the media attention that signing statements have received (Savage 2007), their actual policy significance remains unsubstantiated (Ostrander and Sievert 2013).

Still, under Barack Obama’s administration, presidential entrepreneurialism continues unabated. Like his predecessors, Obama has sought to harness and consolidate his influence outside of Congress. And like his predecessors, he has made contributions of his own to the expanding arsenal of administrative policy devices. The most creative, perhaps, is his Race to the Top (RttT) initiative. Equipped with a relatively modest sum of money, Obama attempted to spur wide-ranging reforms in a policy domain – education – over which he exercised no constitutional authority. Through a series of competitions in which state applicants stood to win federal funds on the basis of their demonstrated willingness to adopt education policies that the Obama administration supported, Obama introduced an altogether new tool for presidents to expand their influence.

This paper evaluates the results of such efforts. In particular, it assesses RttT’s short-term impacts on state-level policy making. To do so, it draws on three original datasets: one on state applications to the RttT competitions themselves; another on state policy-making trends in a range of education policies that relate, to varying degrees, to the RttT competition; and a third on State of the State speeches. The paper then relies upon a variety of identification strategies to gauge the influence of RttT on the nation’s education policy landscape.

Given the observational nature of these data, no single test provides incontrovertible evidence about the causal effects of RttT. The overall findings, however, are at least consistent with RttT having had a meaningful impact on the production of education policy.

When scoring RttT applications, the federal Department of Education (hereafter, DOE) rewarded states on both their past policy achievements and their expressed commitments to enact new policies. In the aftermath of RttT, all states experienced a marked surge in the adoption of education policies. This increase was significantly more pronounced on policies that were explicitly mentioned and rewarded under the RttT competitions than for other related education reforms. The observed increase in the production of RttT policies also was particularly acute among states that won the RttT competition and especially concentrated in the subset of RttT policies on which states made explicit policy commitments in their RttT applications. Though we cannot rule out the possibility that the DOE successfully forecasted policies that states would have adopted in the absence of RttT, the aggregate evidence combined with facts about the competition and subsequent DOE monitoring suggest that RttT either hastened the production of policies already under consideration or promoted the adoption of altogether new policies.

The paper proceeds as follows. The first section describes the RttT competition, while the second juxtaposes it within the relevant scholarly literatures. The third section presents evidence that RttT rewarded state applicants on the basis of both their past policy achievements and their future policy commitments. The fourth presents and analyzes new data on state policy making, summarizes the policymaking agendas as expressed through gubernatorial speeches across the 50 states, and briefly characterizes the changes in education policy making wrought by RttT in three states. The fifth section concludes.

1 Situating RttT within Existing Literatures

This paper sits at the intersection of three empirical literatures that rarely engage one another: the first on the president's unilateral powers, the second on federalism, and the third consisting of specific evaluations of RttT itself. I briefly summarize each in turn.

A distinguishing feature of RttT, as discussed at greater length below, is the fact that it emanated from executive rather than legislative initiative. Though Congress delegated the requisite funds, it was the President and his subordinates who designed the competition itself. RttT, as such, would appear to fall within the purview of a burgeoning group of scholars who examine the president's powers of unilateral action (Howell 2003; Mayer 2001; Warber 2007; Cooper 2002). This research examines the particular conditions under which the president and his subordinates rely upon different administrative actions (memoranda, executive orders, proclamations, and the like) in order to advance policies that would not survive the legislative process. So doing, this research focuses nearly exclusively on policies that emanate from the president himself or different administrative agencies under his purview. Such policies, moreover, have legal standing and policy content in their own right. Though an executive order may be issued in lieu of a legislative enactment, or in order to

spur legislative activity, the order itself materially changes the actions of government in ways – whether large or small – that have real-world consequences.

Though designed and implemented within the executive branch, RttT does not fit easily within the broader arsenal of unilateral powers commonly attributed to the president. The potential significance of RttT lies not in the policies that it institutes but rather the incentives it creates for other governing bodies (in this instance, states) to enact new policy. Through RttT, the Obama administration hoped to encourage states to enact policies that it could not issue itself. With constitutional responsibility over education resting among states, the Obama administration could not unilaterally mandate the adoption of specific policies. The entire purpose of RttT, then, was to encourage states to adopt the President’s education agenda as its own.

The literature on federalism, by contrast, has a great deal to say about the relationships between the federal and state governments; and, more specifically, about the efforts of the president and Congress to influence state-level policy making. For the most part, however, this literature focuses on dynamics that relate only weakly to RttT. Scholars have investigated the various oversight mechanisms utilized by the federal government to improve the chances that state governments will implement federal statutes in ways that comport with the underlying interests of Congress and the President (see, e.g., Huber and Shipan 2002, chapter 5; Derthick 1970; Smith 1968). And going back at least to V.O. Key (1937), scholars have investigated the ways in which the federal government structures grants in order to stimulate the local production of state and local policies that address specific problems (see also: Hale and Palley 1981; Nathan 1970; Peterson, Rabe, and Wong 1986; Volden 1999; Knight 2002).

In important ways, however, RttT breaks from all of these reasonably well-understood features of federal-state relations. Most obviously, RttT grants were distributed through a competition rather than through programmatic disbursements. RttT also does not link federal funding to a state’s willingness to comply with the terms a newly enacted federal statute. Rather, RttT is expressly designed to encourage states to adopt altogether new policies; and should states opt not to participate in the competition, they suffer no penalty whatsoever. Moreover, RttT distinguishes itself by its highly prescriptive nature. Unlike grants that encourage municipal and state governments to devise new solutions for problems like poverty or environmental decay, RttT dictates the precise policies that a state must adopt in order to receive higher scores under the competition. RttT does not support state governments in their independent efforts to solve education problems as they see fit. Rather, it holds out the possibility of receiving financial aid for adopting specific policies that the DOE, and with it, the president, supports.

Historically, the federal government also has attempted to shape state-level policy making through various punitive measures. For instance, the federal government may tie the

continued appropriation of transportation funds to a state's maintenance of a specified minimum drinking age. In such instances, there is a direct relationship between a state's adoption of a policy and the continued appropriation of federal funds. In RttT, however, the link was not nearly so strong. For starters, policy-making efforts only grant states the opportunity to enter a competition for federal funds. The successful fulfillment of DOE expectations did not guarantee funding. Even when they were granted, federal funds were disbursed on the basis of a state's overall policy efforts, not on a policy-by-policy basis. Moreover, excelling in the competition depended not just on past policy achievements, but also on promises of future policy action. And finally, the competition itself was shrouded in uncertainty, as participating states were not informed about the number of expected winners, the threshold for winning, or the exact amounts of money that they could expect to receive.

Being a distinctive type of policy intervention, RttT has not gone without notice. A number of scholars have examined the initial participation rates in the RttT competition. Paul Manna and Laura Ryan (2011), for instance, identify a variety of potential explanatory variables – including the partisanship of the state governor, whether a state received foundation support, population density, and the like – associated with programmatic participation rates. Other scholars have identified some of the factors that distinguished winning from losing state applications. In this vein, Patrick McGuinn (2010) presents evidence that a state's prior policy achievements had no material bearing on the results of its RttT application.¹ In June of 2011, the General Accounting Office also released a report that detailed some of the efforts made by states to improve their chances of winning in the RttT competitions.² With funds being distributed to winning states, a number of state and federal agencies have begun to investigate compliance patterns. This work, in the main, assesses the extent to which states followed through on the promises they made in their initial RttT applications.³ These government-sponsored studies provide detailed and exhaustive auditing of selective states' compliance.

Conducting an audit of state compliance, however, is not the same as assessing the impact of the competition itself. The relevant comparison standard for evaluating a state's compliance is the litany of promises it made in its applications. To assess the actual impact of RttT on a state's policy-making efforts, however, we need to characterize the policies that a state would have pursued in the absence of the competition itself. It is of some note, then, that most studies on compliance patterns do very little by way of actual analysis.⁴ Indeed, the largest of their kind (Webber et al 2014) explicitly disavows any interest in estimating the actual impact of RttT on state legislative activities. For all the media and scholarly interest that RttT has garnered, we still lack any meaningful gauge of how RttT more broadly altered state-level policy making, if at all.

2 The Race to the Top Competition

Since the original enactment of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act nearly a half century ago, the federal government has played a steadily increasing role in the formulation and implementation of education policy around the country. While the constitutional responsibility to educate children remains the purview of states, the federal government has asserted itself in multifaceted ways: reducing funding inequalities between localities; combatting racial and gender discrimination; consecrating new educational rights and opportunities for disabled students; and, most recently, promoting various types of accountability. Throughout this period, Congress and the president have leveraged financial inducements to advance policy reform. It is of some note, then, that the federal government covers a rapidly rising share of education spending across the country.⁵ Concomitantly, the proportion of the American public that believes that the federal government should retain primary responsibility for public education, though still a distinct minority, has nearly tripled over the last three decades.⁶

Under the Obama administration, such trends have only accelerated. On policy matters, Barack Obama picked up right where the Bush Administration left off, continuing the push for greater accountability, charter schools, merit pay, and the like. Unlike George W. Bush's education agenda, however, Obama's has been advanced through altogether new and unorthodox means: first, through the use of state competitions for federal funding, RttT, in which winners are selected on the basis of policy reforms that either already have been enacted or to which some commitment is pledged; and second, through the selective and conditional provision of waivers of the federally enacted No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Rather than provide a purely supporting role in education policy, the federal government today is attempting to establish greater authority over what had been largely a state and local prerogative. And rather than assert authority through the traditional legislative process, the president is experimenting with new ways of asserting influence through administrative channels.

Congress funded RttT through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). Signed into law on February 17, 2009, the ARRA contained \$787 billion in tax cuts and economic stimulus spending. Roughly \$100 billion of the ARRA was allocated for education, of which \$53.6 billion went into the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund (SFSF). The majority of this funding, \$48.6 billion, was given to state governors in exchange for agreeing to implement a series of reforms related to college and career-readiness standards, longitudinal data systems, and high-quality assessments.⁷ The remaining \$5 billion of SFSF was to be distributed through a competitive grant system, \$4.35 billion of which established the Race to the Top fund.⁸

RttT sought to encourage states to adopt education policies that improve college readiness, create new data systems, support teacher effectiveness, and address persistently low

performing schools.⁹ Under ARRA, states also were required to pass at least 50 percent of the funding received under the RttT competition to local education agencies. Beyond these broad guidelines, however, the DOE retained considerable discretion over the design and operation of the competition.¹⁰ Within each category of educational priorities, the Obama administration could freely choose which specific policies would be rewarded under the RttT competition, and by how much; how many states would receive financial rewards, and by what amount; and what kinds of oversight mechanisms would be used to ensure compliance.¹¹ Subsequent to the ARRA's enactment, Congress did not issue any binding requirements for the design or administration of the RttT competition. From an operational standpoint, RttT was nearly entirely the handiwork of the DOE.¹²

Beholden to an ambiguous governing statute, the president sought to induce state-level policy making that aligned with his specific education objectives. As he noted in his July 2009 speech announcing RttT, Obama intended to “incentivize excellence and spur reform and launch a race to the top in America’s public schools.”¹³ At the same press conference, Secretary Duncan called the initiative “a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for the federal government to create incentives for far-reaching improvement in our nation’s schools,” “the equivalent of education reform’s moon shot,” and “a new federal partnership in education reform with states, districts, and unions to accelerate reform.”¹⁴ A 2010 fact sheet released by the White House specifically describes RttT as, “designed to incentivize excellence, spur reform, and promote the adoption and use of effective policies and practices.”¹⁵ And for its part, media coverage echoed such sentiments, with the *Christian Science Monitor* calling the announcement of RttT a “massive incentive for school reform,”¹⁶ and the *New York Times* subsequently arguing that participating states “would never have attempted reform on this scale without the promise of federal help.”¹⁷

The RttT Competitions

One month after the ARRA was signed into law, the Department of Education released a general notice about the competition, announcing the primary policy goals under the competition and informing states that grants would be made in two rounds in the fall of 2009 and spring of 2010.¹⁸ On July 29, 2009, the Obama administration formally announced the RttT competition and invited public comment. Later that year, on November 18, 2009, the DOE published an official notice in the *Federal Register* inviting Phase 1 applications and detailing timelines, requirements and definitions for both Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the competition. Although states were informed of all competition timelines in this official notice, states were not invited to participate in Phase 2 until April 14, 2010.

To participate in any of the RttT competitions, states had to meet two eligibility requirements. First, the state’s State Fiscal Stabilization Fund (SFSF) grants had to be approved by the DOE.¹⁹ And second, states could not have any law or regulation prohibiting the

linking of student achievement or growth data to teachers and principals for the purpose of evaluation.²⁰

Both Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the competition included education policy priorities upon which each applicant would be evaluated. States were asked to describe their current status and outline their future goals in meeting the criteria in each of these categories, and often were asked to provide specific evidence to support their claims. The education policy priorities spanned six major scoring categories and one scoring competitive preference category, which are summarized in Table 1. Within the six major categories, further point breakdowns were established for different sub-categories. In each sub-category points were aggregated up to their respective overall category and totaled across to determine a state's final score.

Table 1: Policy Categories and Point Allocations in RttT

<p>(1) State Success Factors: Articulating State's education reform agenda and LEA participation; building strong statewide capacity to implement, scale up, and sustain proposed claims; demonstrating significant progress in raising achievement and closing gaps; advancing standards and Assessments. (<i>125 points</i>)</p> <p>(2) Standards and Assessments: Developing and adopting common core standards; developing and implementing common, high-quality assessments; supporting the transition to enhanced standards and high-quality assessments. (<i>70 points</i>)</p> <p>(3) Data Systems to Support Instruction: Fully implementing a statewide longitudinal data system; accessing and using state data; using data to improve instruction. (<i>47 points</i>)</p> <p>(4) Great Teachers and Leaders: Providing high-quality pathways for aspiring teachers and principals; improving teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance; ensuring equitable distribution of effective teachers and principals; improving the effectiveness of teacher and principal preparation programs; providing effective support to teachers and principals. (<i>138 points</i>)</p> <p>(5) Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools: Intervening in the lowest-achieving schools and LEAs; turning around the lowest-achieving schools; demonstrating other significant reform conditions. (<i>50 points</i>)</p> <p>(6) General: Making education funding a priority; ensuring successful conditions for high-performing charter schools and other innovative schools. (<i>55 points</i>)</p> <p>*Competitive Preference Priority 2: Offering a rigorous course of study in mathematics, sciences, technology, and engineering (STEM); cooperating with industry experts, museums, universities, and other STEM-capable community partners to provide support to educators in integrating STEM content; providing applied student learning opportunities with particular emphasis on underrepresented groups and girls/women. (<i>15 points</i>)</p>

To assist states in writing their applications, the DOE offered technical assistance planning workshops, webinars, and training materials. Additionally, non-profit entities such as National Council on Teacher Quality published readily accessible reports intended to help states maximize their likelihood of winning.²¹ Nonetheless, substantial uncertainty shrouded some of the most basic components of the Race to the Top competition including exact grading procedures, number of possible winners, total allocated prize amount per winning state, and the prize allocation mechanism and timeline.

Phase 1 applications were due on January 19, 2010. As shown in Table 2, 40 states and the District of Columbia submitted applications.²² Finalists were announced on March 4, 2010, and the two official winners were declared on March 29, 2010. Phase 1 winners Tennessee and Delaware were awarded \$500 million and \$100 million, respectively.²³ Shortly thereafter Phase 2 applications were due on June 1, 2010. The application criteria were the same for Phase 2, though Phase 1 winners could not apply and other states could resubmit amended applications. A total of 35 states and the District of Columbia entered the competition in Phase 2. Finalists and winners were announced on July 27, 2010 and August 24, 2010 respectively. Phase 2 had a total of 10 winners, each awarded on average \$332.5 million with prize packages spanning \$75 million to \$700 million.

Having exhausted the ARRA funds, the President in 2011 sought additional support for his RttT initiatives. That spring, Congress allotted funds to support a third phase. In three important ways, Phase 3 differed from previous rounds. First, only non-winning finalists from Phase 2 of the competition were allowed to participate. Second, the policy scope of Phase 3 was significantly smaller. Each competing state was required to provide evidence-based assurances to confirm previous commitments to reform made in Phase 2 applications.²⁴ States, however, had some latitude to choose those activities and projects from their Phase 2 application that they planned to focus on pursuing. And finally, a significantly higher percentage of participating states won in Phase 3 of the competition, though the amounts of these grants were considerably smaller than those from Phases 1 and 2. On December 23, 2011, the DOE announced Phase 3 winners, which received grants ranging from \$17.1 million to \$42.8 million.²⁵

Fund Disbursement and Monitoring

Each winning state received an award letter with an enclosed grant award notification for its Race to the Top funds. Winning states could immediately withdraw up to 12.5 percent of the overall award. The remaining balance of funds were available to winning states only after the DOE, within 90 days of announcing the award, received and approved final Scopes of Work from a state's participating local education agencies. Each winning state's drawdown of funds, then, depended upon its ability to meet the specific goals and timelines outlined in its Scope of Work. Any amendments or revisions to Scopes of Works

Table 2: Race to the Top Applicants, Winners and Losers

States	Phase 1 Deadline: January 19, 2010	Phase 2 Deadline: June 1, 2010	Phase 3 Deadline Part I: November 22, 2011 Deadline Part II: December 16, 2011
Alabama	Participant	Participant	Not Invited
Alaska	Non-participant	Non-participant	Not Invited
Arizona	Participant	Participant*	Invited** Award: \$25 million
Arkansas	Participant	Participant	Not Invited
California	Participant	Participant*	Invited
Colorado	Participant*	Participant*	Invited** Award: \$18 million
Connecticut	Participant	Participant	Not Invited
Delaware	Participant** Award: \$100 million	N/A	N/A
D.C.	Participant*	Participant** Award: \$75 million	N/A
Florida	Participant*	Participant** Award: \$700 million	N/A
Georgia	Participant*	Participant** Award: \$400 million	N/A
Hawaii	Participant	Participant** Award: \$75 million	N/A
Idaho	Participant	Non-participant	Not Invited
Illinois	Participant*	Participant*	Invited** Award: \$43 million
Indiana	Participant	Participant	Not Invited
Iowa	Participant	Participant	Not Invited
Kansas	Participant	Non-participant	Not Invited
Kentucky	Participant*	Participant*	Invited** Award: \$17 million
Louisiana	Participant*	Participant*	Invited** Award: \$17 million
Maine	Non-participant	Participant	Not Invited
Maryland	Non-participant	Participant** Award: \$250 million	N/A
Massachusetts	Participant*	Participant** Award: \$250 million	N/A
Michigan	Participant	Participant	Not Invited
Minnesota	Participant	Non-participant	Not Invited
Mississippi	Non-participant	Participant	Not Invited
Missouri	Participant	Participant	Not Invited
Montana	Non-participant	Participant	Not Invited
Nebraska	Participant	Participant	Not Invited
Nevada	Non-participant	Participant	Not Invited
New Hampshire	Participant	Participant	Not Invited

States	Phase 1 Deadline: January 19, 2010	Phase 2 Deadline: June 1, 2010	Phase 3 Deadline Part I: November 22, 2011 Deadline Part II: December 16, 2011
New Jersey	Participant	Participant*	Invited** Award: \$38 million
New Mexico	Participant	Participant	Not Invited
New York	Participant*	Participant** Award: \$700 million	N/A
North Carolina	Participant*	Participant** Award: \$400 million	N/A
North Dakota	Non-participant	Non-participant	Not Invited
Ohio	Participant*	Participant** Award: \$400 million	N/A
Oklahoma	Participant	Participant	Not Invited
Oregon	Participant	Non-participant	Not Invited
Pennsylvania	Participant*	Participant*	Invited** Award: \$41 million
Rhode Island	Participant*	Participant** Award: \$75 million	N/A
South Carolina	Participant*	Participant*	Invited
South Dakota	Participant	Non-participant	Not Invited
Tennessee	Participant** Award: \$100 million	N/A	N/A
Texas	Non-participant	Non-participant	Not Invited
Utah	Participant	Participant	Not Invited
Vermont	Non-participant	Non-participant	Not Invited
Virginia	Participant	Non-participant	Not Invited
Washington	Non-participant	Participant	Not Invited
West Virginia	Participant	Non-participant	Not Invited
Wisconsin	Participant	Participant	Not Invited
Wyoming	Participant	Non-participant	Not Invited

* Finalist ** Winner

required DOE approval. Though the DOE agreed to consider requests for no-cost extensions, RttT funds had to be spent at the consummation of the 4-year grant period, lest they revert to the U.S. Department of the Treasury.²⁶

States that won RttT were subject to a rigorous monitoring process, known as the “program review.” Each state’s program review, which occurred annually, was undertaken by two administrative units within the DOE, the Implementation Support Unit and the Reform Support Network. Under the review, states had to submit monthly updates that describe activities implemented and their quality, performance measures, and any challenges that they have encountered in the adoption or implementation of RttT policies. State reports were benchmarked against the timelines and outcomes outlined in the Scopes of Work. States also had to submit annual Accountability and Oversight Protocols to show compliance with fiscal requirements and monitoring of participating LEAs. Separately, the DOE conducted

yearly visits during which they compared these submitted documents against on-the-ground evidence and the promises made in states' Scopes of Work. Finally, states had to submit Annual Performance Reports summarizing their progress to date, and the DOE wrote yearly State-Specific Reports assessing implementation. A concluding Comprehensive Race to the Top Report will be published at the culmination of the RttT grant period.

3 Rewarding Past Achievements and Promises of Future Action

In its public rhetoric, the Obama administration went out of its way to underscore its intention to use RttT to stimulate new education policy activity. But in the actual competitions, did the DOE reward states on the basis of past policy achievements or commitments for future policy actions? To investigate the matter, a team of research assistants and I identified policy initiatives that clearly fit the various criteria laid out under RttT. We scoured the RttT instructions and supporting materials for endorsements of clear education policies. In some sections of the applications, a single such policy emerged. For example, in section D(2)(i), states were graded on the basis of their support for policies to measure student growth for each individual student. This specific policy, then, was one that we tracked. Other sections of the grant applications assessed states' willingness to enact multiple, related policies. For example, in section D(2)(iv), states were graded on the basis of five specific policy measures that related to alternative routes to teacher and principal certification. This section, therefore, was broken into five distinct variables for policy tracking purposes.²⁷

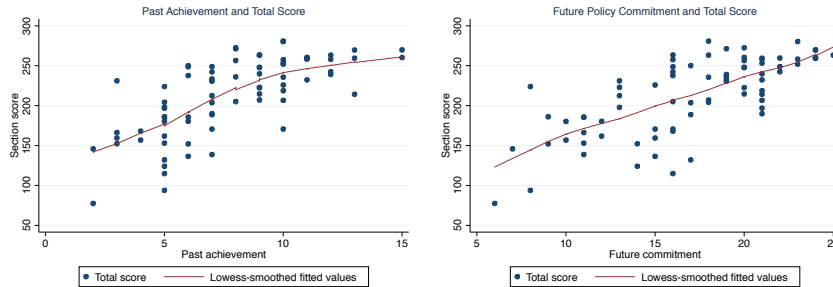
For a variety of reasons, policies identified in some sections of the applications were excluded from the analysis. Policies that could be implemented without being codified into state law were systematically excluded, as were policies that were excessively vague or that lacked any variation across states. We also excluded provisions that assessed student outcomes rather than specific policy achievements.²⁸

In the end, we isolated 27 distinct policies that covered such topics as charter schools, data management, intervention into low performing schools, and the use of test scores for school personnel policy. (A complete list of policies and their descriptions are included in Appendix A.) Having selected the relevant education policies, we then assessed whether each state in their written application claimed to have already made significant advancement, promised to do so in the future, or a combination of both. So doing, we deliberately avoided any value judgment calls about whether the policies, in any meaningful sense, were working. Though RttT application guidelines periodically recognized the importance of "efficient" or "effective" state policies, they did not stipulate hard and fast rules for how such policies might be evaluated. Lacking clear indicators of what such qualifiers meant, therefore, we

disregarded them. Instead, we focused on the substantive content of the policies themselves, and we then tracked whether each state applicant claimed to have enacted such a policy or expressed its clear intention to do so.

In Figure 1, we plot the relationship between past policy achievements (in the left panel) and future policy promises (in the right panel) against the number of points that the DOE rewarded states for the relevant section of their application. In both instances, a strong positive correlation is observed. States that claimed to have already enacted policies as well as states that expressed their clear intention to do so received systematically higher scores on the relevant subsections of their applications. Whether we aggregate the scores at the relevant subsection level or over the entire application, whether we pool across different phases of the competition or examine them separately, and whether we estimate the relationships separately or jointly, we find a strong and statistically significant relationship between past policy achievement and future policy promises and a state’s performance in the RttT application.²⁹ Both past achievements and commitments to future policy action improved a state’s odds of winning the RttT competition.

Figure 1: Scatter plots of section scores, by prior achievement and future commitment



Dots represent state-by-section observations from either Phase 1 or 2 of the RttT applications. For both panels, the y-axis represents the section score that applications received. On the left panel, the x-axis identifies the number of past achievements of coded RttT policies within the relevant section. On the right panel, the x-axis identifies the number future commitments of coded RttT policies within the relevant section.

4 Estimating the Effect of RttT on State-Level Policy-making

To identify the effects of RttT on state-level policy making, ideally we would leverage some form of exogenous variation in either participation or eligibility requirements. Unfortunately, neither of these strategies is possible, as all states were allowed to enter the com-

petition, and participation was entirely voluntary. To discern RttT’s policy consequences, therefore, we must exploit other kinds of comparisons between overall policy changes in winning, losing, and non-participating states, commitments by different states made in the applications and subsequent policy-making activities, and changes in policy making at different intervals of the RttT competitions. Though no single empirical estimate supports dispositive claims, the assembled evidence, taken in aggregate, suggests that the RttT did in fact induce meaningful changes in state-level policy making.

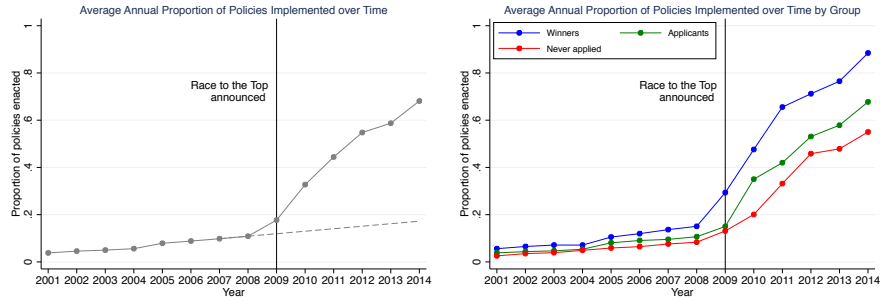
Policy Analysis

To document trends in actual policy enactments across the 50 states and District of Columbia, we tracked the same 27 policies that constituted our coding of the RttT applications along with three additional control policies, which were similar to RttT policies but were neither mentioned nor rewarded under the RttT competitions. Whenever possible we used pre-existing databases, such as National Council on Teacher Quality reports and edcounts.org, as starting points for our investigation. Both to verify and extend these data, we examined the specific statutory language of each state policy to ensure it matched the specific criteria outlined in RttT. To qualify, a policy needed to have the weight of law, whether statutorily or administratively acquired. Policies that were merely proposed or out for comment, therefore, did not qualify. Under our screening criteria policies also had to apply – at least legally – across the entire state, which excluded pilot programs in particular districts or metropolitan regions. When screening policies, however, we did not account for the scope or timing of a state’s implementation strategy. As long as the policy was on the books, it met our criteria. And finally, a policy counted toward a state’s annual policy achievement as long as it was passed within that calendar year.³⁰

Figure 2 presents overall trends in the adoption of these policies between 2001 and 2014. The solid line identifies when RttT was formally announced in 2009.³¹ All observations reflect the average proportion of policies adopted by states within a given calendar year. As the left panel shows, states around the country enacted these policies at a much higher rate after RttT than they had before. Between 2001 and 2008, states on average enacted about 10 percent of these policies. Between 2009 and 2014, however, 68 percent did so. And during this later period, adoption rates increased every single year. The rate of increase, moreover, appears distinctly higher than what one would have predicted if one simply projected the slope of change observed between 2007 and 2008, which is shown by the dashed line. At the rate established by preexisting trends, it would have taken states multiple decades to accomplish what, in the aftermath of RttT, was accomplished in less than 5 years.

The right panel disaggregates the policy activities of three groups of states: those that won one of the three RttT competitions, those that applied to at least one competition but never won, and those that never applied. In nearly every year between 2001 and 2008,

Figure 2: Trends in RttT Policy Enactment



Unit of analysis is binary implementation of a policy by a state in a year, with policy at the level of aggregation coded by the RttT team (thus, policies for principals and teachers are coded separately). The 2014 data point represents policy implementation as of April 2014. The dotted line in the left panel extends the trend line from 2007 to 2008, and thus represents a counterfactual in the absence of RttT. Winners are states that won in any round of the competition and applicants are states that applied in at least one round but never won. This definition is not dynamic over time – that is, Round 3 (2011) winners that had not yet won in 2010 are still counted as winners in that year. The main policy areas covered by RttT were announced on March 7, 2009. All but one of the policies represented in the 2009 data point above were implemented before that date.

adoption rates in these groups were indistinguishable from one another. In the aftermath of RttT’s announcement, however, adoption rates for all three groups increased markedly, but the differences between the groups grew wider in every passing year. By 2014, winning states had adopted, on average, 88 percent of the policies, as compared to 68 percent among losing states and 56 percent among states that never applied.

When surveying the complete time series, winning states first distinguished themselves in 2009. The burst of policy-making activity among these states, however, occurred after the RttT competitions were announced in March. The overwhelming majority of policies that were implemented by winning states in 2009 occurred in June (19 signatories to the Common Core) or later (36 additional policy adoptions across the winning states). Commenting on this initial burst of policy-making activity at the time, Education Sector co-founder Andrew Rotherham noted, “It’s remarkable that before he’s even spent a nickel, [Obama has] sparked a national conversation.”³²

From these time trends, it is difficult to assess the magnitude of the effect of RttT on state-level policy making. It is possible, after all, that all states were in some sense “treated” by the competition, which helps explain why both losing states and states that never applied to the competition also enacted RttT policies at significantly higher rates after 2009. As discussed in greater detail below, anecdotal media reports as well as interviews conducted by my research team suggest that the process of applying to the RttT competitions by itself generated some momentum behind policy reform. Such momentum, along with the

increased attention given to RttT policies, might also explain why those states that did not even apply to the competition nonetheless began to enact these policies at higher rates.

On the basis of the evidence before us, however, we cannot rule out the possibility that states would have enacted these policies even in the absence of RttT. Indeed, the fact that states that never applied to any of the competitions adopted the policies at higher rates suggests that these are policies whose time had come. States that applied, meanwhile, may have done so in order to reap the benefits of policy activities that they would have done on their own accord. And the DOE, for its part, clearly signaled its intention to select winners partially on the basis of its assessments of the likelihood that states would follow through on their policy promises.³³

To sharpen the comparisons of state policy-making activities, therefore, we estimate a series of regressions that take the following general form:

$$Y_{itp} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 won_{it} + \beta_2 lost_{it} + \beta_3 Y_{i,t=2008,p} + \gamma_t + \rho_p + \varepsilon_{itp} \quad (4.1)$$

where Y_{itp} is a binary outcome for policy p in state i in year t ; won_{it} is a dummy variable for winning the competition at any time up to and including year t ; $lost_{it}$ is a dummy variable for applying at any time up to and including year t but never winning up to that point; $Y_{i,t=2008,p}$ is the outcome variable in 2008 (prior to the competition); γ_t is a year fixed effect; and ρ_p is a policy fixed effect. Separate models are estimated for RttT policies and a handful of control policies, which are similar in form and function to RttT policies but for which no points were rewarded in any of the competitions.³⁴ We focus on results for the period between 2008 and 2014, during which the RttT intervention actually occurred. For ease of interpretation, linear probability models are estimated, and standard errors are clustered at the state level.³⁵

The results are presented in Table 3. Models 1a and 1b include only identifiers for winners and losers, with non-applicants serving as the base category. The next two sets of models add year fixed effects and then year as well as policy fixed effects. Models 4a and 4b then include a covariate that denotes whether a state had adopted the relevant policy in 2008, the year before RttT competitions were announced.

The results comport with the basic trends observed in Figure 2. Depending upon the model, winning states are, on average, 36 to 42 percentage points more likely to have adopted a RttT policy after the competitions than non-applicant states. And while losing states also are more likely to have adopted such policies, the estimated effects for winning states is roughly twice as large in magnitude, a difference that is statistically significant at $p < .01$. Winning states also are more likely to have adopted one of the control policies, which is not altogether surprising given the complementarities between RttT policies and the chosen control policies. Still, the estimated correlation of winning and the adoption of RttT policies is nearly twice as large as that of winning and the adoption of control policies, a difference

that is statistically significant at $p < .05$.³⁶

To further clarify the relationship between RttT and state-level policy making, we can distinguish the subset of policies on which winning and losing states made explicit commitments in their applications. In so doing, we account not only for the results of the RttT competitions but also for the specific promises that states made in these competitions. We re-estimate each of the models in Table 3, but this time we also include interactions between winning and losing states and whether they promised to adopt a specified policy in their last RttT application.³⁷ The modified regression presents itself as:

$$Y_{itp} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 won_{it} + \beta_2 lost_{it} + \beta_3 won * promise_{itp} + \beta_4 lost * promise_{itp} + \beta_5 Y_{i,t=2008,p} + \gamma_t + \rho_p + \varepsilon_{itp} \quad (4.2)$$

where $won * promise$ and $lost * promise$ represent the interaction terms and all other variables are the same as in equation 4.1 above.

Table 4 offers the results. Across the various model specifications, the main effect for winning remains substantively large and highly significant. Once the interaction effects are introduced, however, the main effect for losing states diminishes in size and, in some specifications, is no longer significant. Having accounted for differences in their applications, winning states clearly distinguish themselves in their overall policy accomplishments from both losing and non-applying states.

The interaction effects, meanwhile, suggest that both winning and losing states were more likely to adopt policies about which they made clear commitments in their RttT applications. Though the effects are not always statistically significant, winning states appear 7 to 17 percentage points more likely to adopt a policy about which they made a promise than one about which they did not; or, put differently, they were between 41 and 51 percentage points more likely to adopt a policy about which they made an explicit commitment than were non-applying states, which, for obvious reasons, made no promises at all. Losing states, meanwhile, distinguish themselves primarily on the basis of the policy promises they made in their applications. Depending on the model, such states were 21 to 24 percentage points more likely to adopt a policy on which they had made a promise than on a policy on which they had not; or, on average, 30 percentage points more likely to have adopted a policy on which they had made a commitment than were non-applying states.

The main results presented thus far are robust to a variety of alternative specifications. When estimating models that include data on policy adoptions back to 2001, the results are substantively unchanged.³⁸ When including a variety of state-specific covariates that identify the partisan make-up of the state government, the presence of divided government, per-capita income, and so-called “right to work” constitutional provisions, the results, again, appear largely consistent with those observed here.³⁹ When coding policy observations from

Table 3: RttT Policy Enactment among Winners and Losers

	(1a) RttT Coded Policies	(1b) Control Policies	(2a) RttT Coded Policies	(2b) Control Policies	(3a) RttT Coded Policies	(3b) Control Policies	(4a) RttT Coded Policies	(4b) Control Policies
Won RttT	0.425*** (0.068)	0.291** (0.142)	0.405*** (0.068)	0.286* (0.143)	0.405*** (0.068)	0.279* (0.143)	0.401*** (0.051)	0.182*** (0.052)
Lost RttT	0.164** (0.068)	0.103 (0.134)	0.174** (0.068)	0.105 (0.135)	0.174** (0.068)	0.101 (0.135)	0.195*** (0.049)	0.087* (0.049)
Pre-RttT control							0.531*** (0.036)	0.788*** (0.053)
Constant	0.274*** (0.060)	0.237* (0.121)	0.112* (0.063)	0.257** (0.121)	0.081 (0.084)	0.410*** (0.138)	0.149*** (0.039)	0.084** (0.033)
Year fixed effects	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Policy fixed effects	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
R^2	0.075	0.040	0.118	0.041	0.291	0.115	0.220	0.573
N	7112	499	7112	499	7112	499	7016	499

Results are from a linear probability model where the dependent variable is a binary indicator for whether a state had a policy on the books that satisfied the criteria established in the relevant section of the RttT application in a given year between 2010 and 2014. Standard errors are clustered by state. *** signifies significance at $p < 0.01$ on a two-tailed test, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$. Won RttT means having won in any year up to and including a given year. Lost RttT means having applied at any point up to and including a given year, but never winning up to that point. Pre-RttT control represents the outcome variable in 2008. RttT policies are the subset of policies included in the RttT application for which we have legislative history data. Control policies were related education policies that were not included in the RttT application.

Table 4: Linking RttT Policy Enactments to Application Promises

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Won RttT	0.334*** (0.082)	0.309*** (0.079)	0.323*** (0.076)	0.328*** (0.080)
Lost RttT	0.057 (0.052)	0.062 (0.052)	0.094* (0.052)	0.073 (0.054)
Won*Promise	0.172** (0.082)	0.177** (0.081)	0.161** (0.077)	0.120 (0.086)
Lost*Promise	0.246*** (0.044)	0.254*** (0.043)	0.201*** (0.044)	0.227*** (0.045)
Pre-RttT control				0.515*** (0.036)
Constant	0.164*** (0.037)	0.281*** (0.043)	0.294*** (0.065)	0.276*** (0.046)
Year fixed effects	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Policy fixed effects	No	No	Yes	No
R^2	0.129	0.171	0.326	0.231
N	3437	3437	3437	3437

Results are from a linear probability model where the dependent variable is a binary indicator for whether a state had a policy on the books that satisfied the criteria established in the relevant section of the RttT application in a given year between 2010 and 2014. Standard errors are clustered by state. *** signifies significance at $p < 0.01$ on a two-tailed test; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.10$. Won*Promise is the interaction of winning RttT at any point up to and including a given year and an indicator for having promised to enact the policy that corresponds to the outcome variable in the most recent RttT application. Lost*Promise is the same interaction except for states that applied to but never won RttT. All other covariates are as described in Table 3.

2009 (when RttT was officially announced) as post-treatment, the core findings carry through. Likewise, when conditioning the effects on 2009 rather than 2008 policy achievements, the main findings appear unchanged.⁴⁰ And finally, when disaggregating the data, we do not observe any clear evidence that the main effects are confined to any particular subset of RttT policies.⁴¹

It is possible, nonetheless, to press the analysis still further, this time by relaxing functional form assumptions while also exploiting variations in when states applied and won the RttT competitions. Recall that Phase 1 and 2 winners were announced in early- and mid-2010, whereas Phase 3 winners were announced at the end of 2011. Phase 3 winners needed only to commit to a subset of the promises they had made in early stages of the competition. By matching winning and losing states according to the policy promises that they made and the overall scores they received in the RttT competitions during each of these years, we can recover still more precise estimates of the different policy-making activities that states undertook.

We estimate three kinds of comparisons. In the first, which tracks policy making in 2010 and 2011, we compare the policy adoption trends of each winning state with those of a losing state that received the closest possible score in the overall competition. Because Phase 3 applicants consisted exclusively of Phase 2 finalists, the recovered estimates largely reflect the difference between Phase 1 and 2 winners with eventual Phase 3 winners. Next, we consider policy making in 2012 and 2013. In our second comparison, we conduct the same matching procedures except this time we compare Phase 1 and 2 winners in the third and fourth years of their granting periods to Phase 3 winners in the first and second years of their granting period. And finally, we compare Phase 3 winners to Phase 1 and 2 losing states that were not subsequently invited to participate in the third competition. For all these comparisons, we present additional estimates that further match on the promises states made in their applications.

The results are presented in Table 5. Once again, we find consistent evidence that RttT winners outperformed RttT losers, particularly in the immediate aftermath of the first two phases of the competition. Regardless of whether we match on the specific promises that states made in their applications, and regardless of the exact bandwidth on which we match states according to the RttT scores, we find that states that won either of the first two phases of the competition were significantly more likely – on the order of 10 to 13 percent – to adopt RttT policies in 2010 and 2011 than were the highest performing losing states.

These observed differences, what is more, do not appear to be a strict artifact of the application process itself. When selecting winners in each of the three phases of the competition, the DOE assessed the likelihood that states would adopt RttT policies. When matching on this particular component of a state’s score, rather than the overall score as done in Table 5, nearly all the same results carry through.⁴² Within the observable data,

Table 5: Matching analysis, legislative histories

Comparison 1: 2010-11, treated observations are Phase 1 and 2 winners and untreated observations are all others

	Match on year and policy			Match on year, policy and promise		
	(1) Band=100	(2) Band=15	(3) Band=5	(4) Band=100	(5) Band=15	(6) Band=5
ATE	0.122* (0.064)	0.107* (0.065)	0.137* (0.070)	0.134*** (0.051)	0.111** (0.052)	0.132** (0.060)
N	1316	868	504	1316	850	476

Comparison 2: 2012-13, treated observations are Phase 3 winners and untreated observations are applicants that never won

	Match on year and policy			Match on year, policy and promise		
	(1) Band=100	(2) Band=15	(3) Band=5	(4) Band=100	(5) Band=15	(6) Band=5
ATE	0.065 (0.056)	0.101* (0.052)	0.359*** (0.050)	0.117** (0.046)	0.078* (0.044)	0.314*** (0.051)
N	1379	790	429	1379	787	361

Comparison 3: 2012-13, treated observations are Phase 1 and 2 winners and untreated observations are all others (including Phase 3 winners)

	Match on year and policy			Match on year, policy and promise		
	(1) Band=100	(2) Band=15	(3) Band=5	(4) Band=100	(5) Band=15	(6) Band=5
ATE	0.109** (0.051)	0.038 (0.048)	0.023 (0.049)	0.153*** (0.042)	0.082** (0.040)	0.074* (0.044)
N	1852	1223	708	1852	1198	678

This analysis implements a nearest neighbor matching algorithm to compare policy implementation in a state that won RttT and the losing state with the closest overall score on the application in the same year. Thus, the estimate represents the Average Treatment Effect (ATE). *** signifies significance at $p < 0.01$ on a two-tailed test; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.10$. In columns 1-3, observations are matched exactly on policy and year, with nearest neighbor matching on application score. In columns 4-6, observations are matched exactly on policy and year as well as promise to implement the policy as reported on the RttT application, with nearest neighbor matching on application score. Both the promise variable and the outcome variable are binary; the outcome variable is aggregated up from coded legislative history data to match the promise variable (for instance, if the state had to implement a policy for both teachers and principals to receive a value of 1 on the application coding, it also had to receive a 1 on both the teacher and principal variable in the legislative history coding). Total score is defined as the score received on the last application a state has submitted of Phases 1-2; thus, a state that applied to RttT in both phases is assigned its Phase 2 application value (Phase 3 scoring is not included since it is not publicly available). Policy promise is drawn from the last application a state submitted, including Phase 3. Comparison 1 matches states that won RttT in Phases 1-2 to states that had not yet won the competition in years 2010-11, which includes some states that later won in Phase 3 as well as some states that never won. Comparison 2 matches Phase 3 winners to states that never won the competition in the years 2012-13. Comparison 3 matches Phase 1-2 winners to their nearest neighbors, including Phase 3 winners as well as states that never won, in the years 2012-13. Each analysis is repeated within three bandwidths. The first, 100, places no restriction on the point distance between states; thus, as long as an observation is matched on the exact criteria, it is included in the analysis, even if there is a significant distance between application scores. The second and third bands restrict a match to within 15 and 5 points on the application respectively, discarding exact matches with a larger point distance.

at least, it does not appear that winning a RttT grant merely signaled forthcoming policy changes that would have occurred absent the competition itself.

The differences registered in the latter two types of comparisons point in the same general direction as those observed in the first. In nearly every instance, states that won a larger share of federal funding – in the second comparison because Phase 1 or Phase 2 grants exceeded Phase 3 grants, and in the third comparison because Phase 3 grantees are compared to states that did not win any funding at all – exhibited higher propensities to adopt RttT policies in 2012 and 2013. For the narrowest bandwidths on RttT score comparisons, Phase 3 winners appeared more than 30 percent more likely to have adopted a RttT policy than were similar states that did not win either of the first two rounds of the competition. And across the various comparisons, Phase 3 winners were significantly more likely to have adopted RttT policies than their matched comparisons among losing states.

Speech Analysis

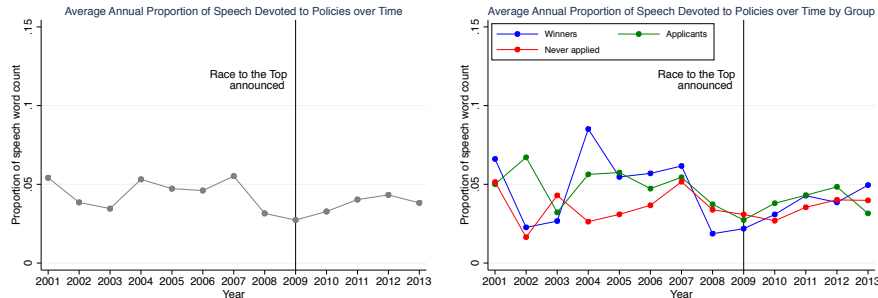
Up until now, we have focused on actual policy accomplishments. It is possible, though, that RttT raised the salience of certain policies, even if these same policies were not actually enacted during the time period under consideration. And if so, the results we have unearthed so far belie still further political – if not yet policy – changes in education.

To gauge the prominence of RttT policies in state governments around the country, we read and coded all State of the State speeches for every state and the District of Columbia over a 12-year period, from 2001 to 2013.⁴³ Unlike the applications and legislative achievements, when coding the State of the State speeches we focused on the larger policy objectives of the RttT contest. Within each speech, then, we measured the number of words devoted to a specific policy category, and then calculated the percentage of each speech devoted to each category. Additional information about the coding of these speeches is available in Appendix C.

Figure 3 documents the general trends in the proportion of State of the State speeches devoted to RttT policies. The findings look quite different from those observed in Figure 2.⁴⁴ Whereas the introduction of RttT coincided with a dramatic upsurge in the adoption of education policies, RttT appears unrelated to the contents of gubernatorial speeches. RttT certainly cannot claim to have introduced specific policies to the policy landscapes in education. Throughout the period, as the left panel clearly shows, roughly 5 percent of State of the State speeches concerned RttT policies. To the extent that differences are observed over time, mentions of RttT policies actually decline in number and length after the first two competitions. As the right panel shows, meanwhile, winning states do not obviously distinguish themselves by the contents of their gubernatorial speeches. In the mid 2000s, the governors of states that would go on to win the competition did devote more space in their speeches to RttT policies. In the years immediately preceding the competitions,

however, governors in such states devoted less attention to RttT policies than did states that would go on to apply but lose the competitions or not apply at all. In the aftermath of the RttT competitions themselves, meanwhile, the trend lines for all three types of states cluster closely around one another.

Figure 3: Trends in RttT Policy Mentions



Unit of analysis is total words devoted to all RttT priorities as a proportion of words in the speech. Winners are states that won in any round of the competition and applicants are states that applied in at least one round but never won. This definition is not dynamic over time – that is, Round 3 (2011) winners that had not yet won in 2010 are still counted as winners in that year. The main policy areas covered by RttT were announced on March 7, 2009. All but one of the policies represented in the 2009 data point above were implemented before that date.

To probe these relationships further, we estimate equivalent models for the speech data as those for the policy accomplishments. Though the level of aggregation differs slightly and the outcomes differ rather dramatically, the basic identification strategies are the same: to trace changes in RttT mentions between winning, losing, and non-applying states; to relate these changes to the specific policy promises states made in their RttT competitions; and to estimate matched comparisons over the course of the funding periods of different RttT competitions.

For the most part, we do not see any differences in the policy mentions of winning and losing states.⁴⁵ Governors of winning and losing states devoted comparable space in their State of the State speeches to RttT policies. In both the regressions and matched comparisons, observed differences between the speeches of winning and losing states are quite small. Both sets of governors, however, appeared more likely to mention RttT policies (but *not* control policies) than non-applying states, particularly in models that control for pre-RttT policy mentions. Governors of winning and losing states also were especially more likely to discuss the subset of policies on which they had made explicit promises, particularly, again, in models that control for pre-RttT policy mentions.

If RttT made a difference in state-level policy making, it was not by foisting upon states altogether new policies. RttT policies were circulating in public discussions about education

reform across the nation long before Obama’s initiative was formally announced or executed. Instead, where RttT appears to have mattered was by pushing education policies already under consideration over the finish line.

Experiences in Three States

That RttT may have altered the trajectories of state-level education policy making is one thing. How RttT did so, however, is quite another. To clarify the deliberations that yielded such dramatic changes in the production of RttT policies among winning, losing, and non-applying states, this section summarizes the experiences of three states.

Illinois, A Phase 3 Winner. Illinois submitted applications in all three rounds of RttT, finally winning in Phase 3. Its biggest policy accomplishments, however, happened well before it received any funds from the DOE. According to a variety of reports, the rapid enactment of RttT policies reflected a concerted effort by the state government to strengthen its application in each competition.

When writing its first round application, Illinois, like all states, had little knowledge of what would constitute a “winning” application. According to Darren Reisberg, who served as Deputy Superintendent and General Counsel at the Illinois State Board of Education from 2005 to 2012, this uncertainty undergirded the state’s policy-making efforts. Not knowing exactly what it would take to secure a federal grant, and recognizing the policy-making efforts of competing states, Illinois took more dramatic action than it otherwise might have.

Some context here is valuable. RttT came at a time when states around the country, very much including Illinois, were strapped for cash. Although the ARRA provided states with a substantial influx of cash through the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund, states still anticipated dire funding shortfalls in the coming years.⁴⁶ According to a 2009 survey of state leaders, “School people want the RttT funds because we need every bit we can get.”⁴⁷ The promise of a significant infusion of federal monies, then, established a very real incentive for policy change.

On January 1, 2010, 18 days prior to the submission date for Phase 1 applications, Illinois enacted the Performance Evaluation Reform Act (PERA), which significantly changed teacher and principal evaluation in Illinois.⁴⁸ Upon learning that it had the highest score among losing states in the Phase 1 competition, Illinois then set to work on strengthening its application for the next round. Indeed, Illinois started implementing policy promises from its Phase 1 application before it even drafted its Phase 2 application.⁴⁹ Efforts to shore up its credentials persisted when Illinois learned that it once again had the dubious honor of receiving the highest number of points among losing states in the Phase 2 competition. The state then enacted Senate Bill 7, which attached consequences to the stipulations in PERA.⁵⁰ In every one of these instances, RttT served as a catalyst for education reform. As State Senator Kimberly Lightford noted, “It’s not that we’ve never wanted to do it before.

I think Race to The Top was our driving force to get us all honest and fair, and willing to negotiate at the table.”⁵¹

According to a variety of media reports, RttT altered the politics of education policy making within the state by focusing the attention of legislators and stakeholders on a limited subset of reforms. Management and teacher unions, reform organizations, and state legislators formed new working relationships and coalitions with one another, which facilitated the adoption of policies that had languished for years. Governor Quinn threw his support behind Illinois’ Round 1 application in late 2009, accelerating policy efforts. With the state legislature intensely focused on policy change, unions “knew they could live with at least some of the concepts the reformers had put forward, and wanted to work to translate those concepts into language that was consistent with their practical experience, philosophy, and values.” The tenuous agreement between the union and state government was first tested by the passage of PERA. “While all stakeholders made compromises, all of them ultimately endorsed the final legislation. The governor’s office had joined legislators in keeping the pressure on to get a deal done, and played an active role in supporting the negotiations.” This was a different process from other major legislation, such as the 2010 pension reform, which was pushed from committee to the governor’s desk in one day. Further, had certain groups not been active in the negotiations and pushed certain issues onto the agenda, “the timeline for developing a bill would have been longer and the results might have been different.”⁵²

Ironically, perhaps, had legislators in Illinois known all along that they would receive only \$42.8 million in the third phase of the competition, it is not at all clear that they would have even applied, much less undertaken so many policy reforms. It was the prospect of substantial funds, rather than the actual delivery of modest funds, that induced policy change within Illinois.

California, Persistent Loser. Following the release of Race to the Top draft criteria in July 2009, it looked as though California would be ineligible to apply for Race to the Top funds. Secretary of Education Duncan had been traveling the country making speeches alluding to Race to the Top criteria that would be included in the applications: the adoption of internationally benchmarked standards; improving the recruitment, retention, and rewarding of educators; improving data collection; and turning around the lowest-performing schools.”⁵³ But, Duncan also emphasized that states with laws barring the use of student achievement data in teacher evaluations would automatically disqualify states from participating. At least three states, California, Wisconsin, and New York, would be affected by this rule.

The criteria outlined by Duncan had not been finalized in July 2009. (The public was given 30 days to comment and the Department would make the final criteria available until October.⁵⁴) Nonetheless, California’s Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger wanted to jumpstart

the legislative process in order to improve California's chances of winning federal funds. The Governor called a special legislative session in August 2009 and outlined a package of reforms that he wanted the Democratic-controlled legislature to consider adopting to improve the state's chances of winning RttT. These included linking student achievement and performance data; repealing the state charter school cap; expanding public school choice; improving turnaround efforts in 5 percent of schools that are consistently failing; using incentive pay for teachers; and changing how the state uses data to measure student, teacher, and school performance.⁵⁵ Schwarzenegger expressed his firm desire that the legislature act by October so that California could apply for Phase 1 of RttT. As he put it, "Our laws that we have in place here in our state do not really kind of match up with what the Obama administration is looking for. We are going to put together in legislation all of the things that the Obama administration is actually calling for. These are all policies that are great, actually, for the state of California and that are great for our kids."⁵⁶

Facing a \$26 billion state budget deficit, Schwarzenegger stressed the importance of California becoming eligible for any federal funding.⁵⁷ "California and its education system have felt the effects of the economic downturn and with every child in every classroom depending on us – I call on the legislature to ensure California leads the Race to the Top."⁵⁸ Commenting on this trend, Charles Barone, director of federal policy for Democrats of Education Reform, noted that "Usually it's exactly the opposite: Money gets sent out, and then the federal government tries to compel states to do what they made a commitment to doing... There's been more state legislation [around education reform] in the last eight months than there was in the entire seven or eight years of No Child Left Behind, in terms of laws passed."⁵⁹

As a result of bipartisan effort in the state legislature, Schwarzenegger signed two bills into law January 7, 2010. The laws constituted clear efforts to strengthen the state's Race to the Top application, which was due on January 19, 2010. The two laws, SBX5 1 and SBX5 4, authorized the use of long-term student data to evaluate individual teachers' effectiveness and create alternative routes for teacher credentialing. They also established stronger processes for reforming persistently low-achieving schools, including requiring reform if over 50 percent of parents in low-performing schools signed a petition.⁶⁰ Through the legislative process, Assembly Speaker Karen Bass (D-Los Angeles) noted that she and Assembly Education Committee Chair Julia Brownley had actually spoken with Duncan before moving forward with the proposal and felt that the law "reflect[s] both the spirit of Race to the Top and the rules released by Secretary of Education Arne Duncan."⁶¹

Although California made significant progress to push through reform to prepare for Phase 1 of the competition, it ended up coming in 27 out of 41 states and was not a finalist. The state made further reforms between Phase 1 and 2 of its application and raised its score to place 16th out of 41 states. As a Phase 2 finalist, California was invited to participate in

Phase 3, which nearly guaranteed funding.⁶² With a change in the governorship, however, came newfound opposition to RttT policies within California. Newly elected Governor Jerry Brown refused to recommit the state to tying student achievement to teacher evaluations and longitudinal tracking of student data, as it had in its Phase 2 application.⁶³ The die, though, had already been cast. California, as such, provides an example of a state that applied repeatedly and made significant policy reforms to improve its standing in the competition, but ultimately never won.

Alaska, Non-Applicant. How might RttT affect policy making within states that never even applied to the competitions? The answer, it turns out, has much to do with the basic processes of policy diffusion, about which a great deal has been written (for one recent review, see Graham, Shipan, and Volden 2013). RttT may not have directly affected policy making in the four states that did not apply to any of the competitions. By jumpstarting education policy reform elsewhere, however, RttT may still have found the necessary inroads to have an impact.

Alaska provides a case in point. When RttT was first announced, Alaskan State Education Commissioner Larry LeDoux cited concerns about federal government power and the urban focus of the program as reasons not to apply. “Alaska has the right to be suspicious of an initiative where we hand over authority,” he said, noting problems in Alaska with NCLB as another reason to be wary of yet another federal program. In the 2008-2009 school year, 224 of 505 schools in Alaska failed to meet the NCLB goals.⁶⁴

Still, in the years that followed, Alaska adopted a batch of policies that either perfectly or nearly perfectly aligned with RttT priorities. One of the most consequential concerned the state’s teacher evaluation program. In 2012, the Alaska Department of Education approved changes that required that 20 percent of a teacher’s assessment of their student’s growth and performance be based on data from at least one standardized test, and 50 percent by the 2018-2019 school year. In defending the rule, Governor Sean Parnell wrote, “Nearly 20 states in the nation now weight at least 33 percent, and many 50 percent, of the performance evaluation based on student academic progress. I would like Alaska to lead in this, not bring up the rear with 20 percent of an evaluation focused on student improvement.”⁶⁵ Those 20 states made those changes in large part because of RttT, which had a strong focus on linking student achievement to teacher evaluations. Governor Parnell clearly wanted to lead the country in this endeavor, even though Alaska did not take part in Race to the Top.

Again consistent with RttT priorities, Alaska recently strengthened its charter laws. In 2013, the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools ranked Alaska 40 out of 43 states that have charter laws.⁶⁶ The governor, once again, appeared distinctly aware of this deficiency and sought to exploit it to advance policy change. In his 2014 State of the State address, Parnell noted, “Unfortunately, Alaska’s charter school law is one of the most restrictive in the country... Charter schools and their students are part of the public school system, but

don't get equal treatment under the law. This is grossly unfair. I propose all local, State and federal funding – except some capped district administrative expenses – travel with a student to a charter school.”⁶⁷ In April 2014, Alaska passed the proposed law remedying many of these issues, including a process to appeal charter denials and increases in the funding for charter schools.⁶⁸

It is difficult to know exactly what Alaska, or any other non-applying state, would have done in the absence of RttT. It is possible, of course, that Alaska would have enacted teacher evaluation and charter reform laws anyway. Anecdotally, though, there is at least some evidence that political leaders within these states were aware of policy developments elsewhere, and felt compelled to act upon them. RttT may not have been the primary reason why non-applying states adopted new education reforms. Such states, however, were not insulated from policy-making developments that RttT promulgated in other states.

5 Conclusion

As examples of presidential entrepreneurialism go, RttT distinguished itself by its conspicuous policy ambitions. In its announcement, media coverage, and basic structure, RttT plainly intended to impress. Through a highly prescriptive competition and a robust monitoring system, the Obama administration sought to remake education policy around the nation.

The evidence presented in this paper suggests that Obama met with a fair bit of success. Indeed, with RttT the president managed to exert altogether new influence through new policy means. In the aftermath of RttT, states adopted at unprecedented rates policies that were explicitly rewarded by the competitions. They did so, moreover, in ways that comported with the outcomes of the competitions themselves and the policy commitments made in them. Winning states adopted RttT policies at significantly higher rates than both losing and non-applying states. Both winning and losing states, meanwhile, were especially likely to adopt policies on which they made explicit promises in their RttT applications.

It is possible, of course, that RttT appeared on scene at a time when states already were poised to enact widespread policy reforms. Several facts, however, suggest that RttT is at least partially responsible for the rising rates of policy adoption from 2009 onwards. First, winning states distinguished themselves from losing and non-applying states more by the enactment of RttT policies than by other related education reforms. Second, at least in 2009 and 2010, RttT did not coincide with any other major policy initiative that could plausibly explain the patterns of policy activities documented in this paper. While the ARRA established a host of education funds to support state policy making in education technology, school improvement, and data systems, the disbursements of these funds looked very different from those of RttT funds. Third, and finally, both local media reports and state

legislators' own testimony confirm the central role that RttT played in the adoption of state policies between 2009 and 2014, either by directly changing the incentives of policymakers within applying states or by generating cross-state pressures in nonapplying states.

Of course, the fact that RttT relied upon a limited and fixed budget presented clear challenges to the Obama Administration. States had, and continue to have, powerful incentive to renege on their policy commitments as soon as the money dried up. To mitigate such behavior, the DOE conditioned the disbursement of funds, which occurred over a four-year period, on demonstrated progress in both the enactment and implementation of RttT policies. Moreover, right when the money began to run out, the DOE used NCLB waivers as a way to renew – and in the case of some states, particularly those that did not participate in RttT, to expand – state-level policy adoptions that matched the president's education agenda. Distinguishing the unique contributions of these two programmatic initiatives to the education policy landscape is beyond the purview of this paper. Suffice it to say, though, that the provision of these waivers, which began in earnest in 2012, clearly represented an effort by the Obama Administration to not only buttress, but also extend the reach of, RttT.

Taken as a whole, the evidence on offer points to RttT having had a positive effect on state-level policy making. Because of the clear selection and contagion effects present, however, it is nearly impossible to pin down a precise estimate of the magnitude of RttT's impact. Observed differences in policy adoption rates between winning and non-applying states understate the true effect of RttT insofar as non-applying states were susceptible to cross-state pressures, as the case study on Alaska suggests; but such differences overstate the true effect of RttT insofar as the DOE chose winners, in part, on the basis of projections of each state's future behavior. Without making strong assumptions about the relative importance of such factors, it is impossible to discern exactly how much state-level policy making RttT stimulated.

It also is important not to lose sight of this paper's scope conditions. None of the preceding analyses speak to the translation of policy enactments into real world outcomes. And for all sorts of reasons – as Terry Moe (forthcoming), Eric Patashnik (2008), and others have documented – the possibility that RttT influenced the production of education policy around the country does not mean that it changed goings-on within schools and districts. Stakeholders that oppose enacted reforms can be expected to work assiduously to dampen their impact. Citizen interest may drift to other topics. Coalitions in support of a policy enactment may fall apart, and procedural restrictions that once strengthened a policy may come undone. As Moe (2011, 367) writes, “Since 2009, when Race to the Top began, the states have engaged in an enormous amount of reformist activity. But there is a big difference between the activity of reform and the substance of reform – which has been far less impressive than all the hoopla would suggest.” Moe's prognosis, meanwhile, is born out

in a series of recent media reports documenting weaknesses in the implementation of newly enacted accountability measures.⁶⁹

Nonetheless, and as Moe himself goes on to note, the legislative activity spurred by RttT constitutes a major accomplishment for the Obama administration. With a relatively small amount of money, lacking any constitutional authority in education, and without the power to unilaterally impose his will upon state governments, Obama managed to jumpstart policy processes that had languished for years in state governments around the country. RttT did not introduce charter schools, accountability measures, or data administration processes to policy discussions occurring around the country. But RttT did create a set of new incentives for states to actually adopt them. So doing, Obama and the federal DOE situated themselves at the very center of legislative and administrative policy-making processes that historically have been the subjects of state and local control.

Notes

¹For a related investigation of the factors that increased a state's chances of winning the RttT competition, see: <http://michiganassessmentconsortium.org/sites/default/files/MAC-Whitepaper-Roeber-RTTT.pdf>.

²See: <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d11658.pdf>.

³The U.S. Department of Education, as such, releases annual performance reports detailing grantee's progress towards the goals set forth in their RttT applications, available here: <http://www.rtt-apr.us/>. At the state level, a partnership between Hawaii and the American Institutes for Research intends to examine, among other things, how well the state implements policies outlined in its RttT application, available here: http://www.air.org/reports-products/index.cfm?fa=viewContent&content_id=1838. The state of Maryland has partnered with the Center for Application and Innovation Research in Education at Towson University to conduct a similar assessment, available here: http://www.msde.state.md.us/RTTT/MonthlyUpdate_NovDec2012.pdf. Likewise, North Carolina's program will be assessed by a team of researchers from the Friday Institute, the Carolina Institute for Public Policy at UNC-Chapel Hill, and the SERVE Center at UNC-Greensboro, which can be seen here: <https://www.fi.ncsu.edu/project/evaluation-of-race-to-the-top>.

⁴But for an important exception, see: http://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/issues/2012/03/pdf/rtt_states.pdf.

⁵As of 2012, the federal government covers an average of 10.8 percent of education spending across the states (see: <http://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/fed/role.html>). Moreover, between 1988 and 2009, federal revenues have increased by 169 percent, as compared to increases of 70 percent for state revenues and 66 percent for local revenues. (http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_sft.asp).

⁶Compare the results presented in Manna 2011, p. 11 with those in the 2012 *Education Next* Poll on public attitudes about education, which is available at: http://educationnext.org/files/EN_PEPG_Survey_2012_Tables1.pdf.

⁷Retrieved from: <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/leg/recovery/factsheet/stabilization-fund.html>

⁸Retrieved from: <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/leg/recovery/implementation.html>. Although this idea had never been implemented before, it had been floated previously in Congress on at least two occasions. In his time in the Senate, President Obama had sponsored a bill to give more money to "innovative districts" that had implemented promising reforms. Rep. George Miller (D-Calif.), Chairman of the Education Committee and a major contributor to the education sections of the ARRA, had also included a similar

concept in a draft of the 2007 No Child Left Behind bill, though it was never formally introduced. Klein, A. (2009). \$5 Billion Pot of Money Draws Plenty of Interest, Raises Some Eyebrows. Education Week. Retrieved from <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2009/02/25/22stimreform.h28.html>.

⁹The Department of Education summarized these objectives as follows: “Making progress toward rigorous college- and career-ready standards and high-quality assessments that are valid and reliable for all students, including English language learners and students with disabilities; establishing pre-K-to college and career data systems that track progress and foster continuous improvement; making improvements in teacher effectiveness and in the equitable distribution of qualified teachers for all students, particularly students who are most in need; providing intensive support and effective interventions for the lowest-performing schools.” The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009: Saving and Creating Jobs and Reforming Education. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/leg/recovery/implementation.html>. These objectives were closely aligned with the four “assurances” states made in order to receive SFSF money earlier in 2009, which in turn, Obama claimed, were based on reforms authorized under the ESEA and America Competes act of 2007. <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/leg/recovery/factsheet/stabilization-fund.html>.

¹⁰As the statute notes, “The Secretary shall determine which States receive grants under this section, and the amount of those grants, on the basis of information provided in State applications under section 14005 and such other criteria as the Secretary determines appropriate.” American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. (2012) Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/leg/recovery/statutory/stabilization-fund.pdf>.

¹¹The lack of congressional oversight became a partisan point of contention. Republicans on the House Education and Workforce Committee wrote, “The U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan has been granted control over a multibillion-dollar slush fund to be awarded to states as he sees fit.” Smith, Lauren. (2012). Duncan Shows Congress the Way Around Gridlock. *Congressional Quarterly*. Retrieved from <http://public.cq.com/docs/weeklyreport/weeklyreport-000004044526.html>.

¹²Republicans in the House and Senate have engaged in symbolic gestures of protest against the President’s push to implement the Common Core. In January 2012, the House education committee approved a bill to prevent the education secretary from promoting uniform standards. Also, in April 2013, Senator Chuck Grassley (R-IA) wrote a letter to Sen. Tom Harkin (D-IA), chairman of the Senate education committee, asking him to bar the secretary of education from using any money in the education funding bill to “oversee state implementation of the standards, develop tests to go along with the standards, or give a leg up in any federal competition to states that adopt the standards” (http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2013/04/gop_senator_no_more_federal_mo.html). Also, a non-binding resolution was introduced by Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC) and Rep. Jeff Duncan (R-SC) in February 2014 reproaching President Obama and Secretary Arne Duncan for incentivizing states to adopt the Common Core through Race to the Top and ESEA waivers (http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2014/02/26/22backlash_ep.h33.html).

¹³Retrieved from: http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-the-President-at-the-Department-of-Education.

¹⁴Retrieved from: <https://www2.ed.gov/news/speeches/2009/07/07242009.html>. Later, in remarks announcing the finalists of the first phase of the competition, Duncan claimed that RTTT was part of a “quiet revolution” in education reform and that the competition had “unleashed an avalanche of pent-up education reform activity at the state and local level.” <http://www.ed.gov/news/speeches/quiet-revolution-secretary-arne-duncans-remarks-national-press-club>.

¹⁵http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/RTT_factsheet.pdf.

¹⁶Gail Chaddock, “Obama’s \$4 Billion Is Massive Incentive for School Reform.” *Christian Science Monitor*. July 24, 2009.

¹⁷Editorial. “Continue the Race.” *New York Times*. August 28, 2010. After the competition announcement, Jack Jennings (as quoted in Chaddock 2009), the founder of the Center on Education Policy, declared that, “Arne Duncan has an unparalleled opportunity to have an influence. No other Secretary of Education

has ever had this much discretionary money available.” Charles Barone, Democrats for Education Reform’s (DFER) director of federal policy, stipulated that, “States wouldn’t have stepped up the way they’ve stepped up without the competition. That’s just the reality.” (Amanda Paulson, “As Race to the Top competition intensifies, so do education reforms.” *Christian Science Monitor*. July 27, 2010.) And the advocacy group Education Sector wrote in 2010 that, “With a relatively modest outlay of money – \$4 billion in a \$600 billion industry – U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan has dramatically reshaped education policy across the country.” (Chad Aldeman, “How Race to the Top Could Inform ESEA Reauthorization.” *Education Week*. June 29, 2010.)

¹⁸Department of Education. (2009a). The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009: Saving and Creating Jobs and Reforming Education. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/leg/recovery/implementation.html>.

¹⁹The SFSF funding was a \$53.6 billion grant program that allowed governors to apply for one-time funding that would help secure state budgets in exchange for “a commitment to advance essential education reforms to benefit students from early learning through post-secondary education.”

²⁰To qualify for participation, therefore, several states – including California, Indiana, Wisconsin, Nevada, and New York – changed their regulations. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/fact-sheet-race-top>.

²¹See: http://www.nctq.org/p/publications/docs/nctq_race_to_top_scorecard.pdf.

²²The only states not to enter the competition were Alaska, Maine, Maryland, Mississippi, Montana, Nevada, North Carolina, North Dakota, Texas, Vermont and Washington.

²³Prize packages was based primarily on the share of its population of children ages 5 through 17. <http://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/delaware-and-tennessee-win-first-race-top-grants>.

²⁴Further details available at: <http://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/department-education-awards-200-million-seven-states-advance-k-12-reform>.

²⁵Although they will not be analyzed in this paper, Congress has approved funding for additional Race to the Top programs every year since the FY 2011 budget. In the FY 2012 budget, Congress allocated \$550 million to Race to the Top. The Department of Education chose to use \$133 million of it to support a second phase of the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge. The remainder was put toward a Race to the Top District Competition, in which school districts could submit applications for funding rather than states. In the FY 2013 budget, Congress again approved \$490 million in funding for Race to the Top. \$370 million of this was allocated to Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge, while \$120 million of the funds were used for another round of Race to the Top District. The President had initially proposed a \$1 billion investment in a Race to the Top College Affordability and Completion program, but it was dropped by Congress. To date, the FY 2014 budget has not yet been passed, so it remains unclear what Race to the Top funding will be included in the final version.

Since RttT, there have been multiple spin-offs that parallel the competitive grant style of this initial initiative. Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge, conducted by the DOE and the Department of Health and Human Services, was jointly announced by Secretary of Education Duncan and Secretary of Health of Human Services Kathleen Sebelius on May 25, 2011. This federally funded state education policy competition sought to encourage innovative and comprehensive reforms in early childhood education learning programs at the state level, with approximately \$500 million at its disposal. To date over \$1 billion has been awarded to 20 states by the Obama administration over a 3 phase interval. In addition, criteria for a district-level Race to the Top program were proposed by the Department of Education on May 22, 2012. This competition sought to capitalize off of lessons learned from previous state-level competitions in an effort to incentivize and build support for bold, innovative, and locally directed reforms to improve student achievement and teacher effectiveness. Since the inception of this program a total of approximately \$500 million has been allocated to 21 winning districts over 2 phases of the competition with the most recent winners being announced on December 17, 2013.

²⁶Further details available at: <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/awards.html#awards>.

²⁷Many of the policies that we tracked contained multiple elements. For example, in each application we examine whether a state’s policy established an evaluation system of both teachers and principals that consisted of more than three possible rating categories. To receive credit for having either already enacted the policy or for promising to do so, we required that states meet the complete list of stipulated obligations. We did not assign partial credit for states that either already enacted or promised to enact selected elements of a policy initiative. In this case, therefore, evaluation systems that focused exclusively on teachers or that only distinguished “ineffective” from “effective” teachers would not count.

²⁸We also did not evaluate the extent to which either past policy achievements or future policy commitments translated into actual changes in schools or classrooms. States received credit exclusively on the basis of their documented claims about policy adoption. The extent to which these policies actually either were or were intended to be implemented across the state did not figure into the coding of applications, the implications of which are discussed at further length in the conclusion.

²⁹Regression results presented in Table C1 of Appendix C.

³⁰Likewise, if a state discontinued a policy within the calendar year, it was coded as not having had the policy.

³¹The first formal announcement of RttT came with the enactment of the ARRA in March of 2009. With the exception of just one policy, however, all legislative activity occurred after the enactment of ARRA.

³²Michele McNeil, “Racing for an Early Edge.” *Education Week*. July 9, 2009.

³³As part of RttT applications, states were required to solicit letters of support from local education agencies and other stakeholders that, the DOE recognized, would wield considerable influence on subsequent compliance patterns.

³⁴Details about these control policies are available in Appendix A.

³⁵None of the core findings change when estimating the models in a maximum likelihood framework.

³⁶Models 4a and 4b present difference-in-difference estimates of the effect of RttT on winning and losing states. By combining the samples across these two models, it is possible to recover difference-in-difference estimates. When doing so, the estimated triple difference in RttT and control policies for losers, winners, and non-applicants over time is positive and statistically significant at $p < .05$.

³⁷As previously discussed, states could apply to as many as three rounds of competitions. In their applications, however, states need not make the same policy commitments. In the main analyses, therefore, we consider whether a state made an explicit policy commitment in their most recent RttT application. We also have estimated models that account for whether states made a policy commitment in any of their applications, and the results are virtually identical.

³⁸Appendix tables to be added.

³⁹Appendix tables to be added.

⁴⁰Appendix tables to be added.

⁴¹Appendix tables to be added.

⁴²Appendix tables to be added.

⁴³State speeches were obtained from The Pew Charitable Trusts (<http://www.pewstates.org/states>). The majority of states were missing only one year, though North Carolina appeared only every other year. When Pew tagged them as State of the State speeches, we also included some governors’ inaugural addresses.

⁴⁴Because all State of the State speeches occur within the first few months of the calendar year, we present 2009 as a single observation in this figure.

⁴⁵Appendix tables to be added.

⁴⁶Hurley, Jeff and Tubbesing, Carl. “Breathing Room.” October, 2009. *State Legislatures Magazine*. Available at http://www.ncsl.org/Portals/1/Documents/magazine/articles/2009/SL_1009-BreathingRoom.pdf.

⁴⁷Center on Education Policy. “An Early Look at the Economic Stimulus Package and the Public Schools.” December, 2009. Available at <http://www.cep-dc.org/publications/index.cfm?selectedYear=2009>.

⁴⁸Illinois State Board of Education Performance Evaluation Advisory Council. “New Evaluation Systems Provide Illinois Educators Greater Support.” Available at <http://www.isbe.net/peac/>.

⁴⁹Gilmer, Marcus. “State is ‘Race to the Top’ Finalist.” March 4, 2010. Chicagoist. Available at http://chicagoist.com/2010/03/04/state_is_race_to_the_top_finalist.php; Democrats for Education Reform. “Illinois: Why It Lost and What It Can Do To Win Round 2.” 2010. Available at <http://www.dfer.org/Illinois%20Race%20Smarter%20Brief.pdf>.

⁵⁰Illinois State Board of Education. “Performance Evaluation Reform Act and Senate Bill 7.” Available at <http://www.isbe.state.il.us/%5C/PERA/default.htm>; US Department of Education. “Nine States and the District of Columbia Win Second Round Race to the Top Grants. August 24, 2010. Available at <http://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/nine-states-and-district-columbia-win-second-round-race-top-grants>.

⁵¹Illinois Watchdog website. “Race to the Top Failure Spurs Senate Education Reform.” April 18, 2011. Available at <http://watchdog.org/39598/ilshn-race-to-the-top-failure-spurs-senate-education-reform/>.

⁵²Regenstein, Elliot. “Illinois: The New Leader in Education Reform?.” July, 2011. Education Counsel for the Center on American Progress. Available at http://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/issues/2011/07/pdf/illinois_education.pdf.

⁵³Available at <http://bit.ly/1fu9uhV>.

⁵⁴Available at <http://bit.ly/1fu9uhV>; http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2009/08/california_lawmakers_racing_ba.html.

⁵⁵http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2009/08/california_lawmakers_racing_ba.html.

⁵⁶<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2009/09/02/02calif.h29.html>.

⁵⁷<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2009/09/02/02calif.h29.html>.

⁵⁸blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2009/08/california_lawmakers_racing_ba.html.

⁵⁹Amanda Paulson, “Education Reform: California to Join Race to the Top Rush.” *Christian Science Monitor*. January 5, 2010.

⁶⁰<http://news.heartland.org/newspaper-article/2010/02/01/california-passes-reforms-compete-race-top>.

⁶¹http://www.huffingtonpost.com/karen-bass/the-california-legislatur_b_416816.html.

⁶²<http://edsources.org/2011/california-denied-race-to-the-top-funding-for-third-time/3552#.U1q4L1e4GZQ>.

⁶³<http://edsources.org/2011/california-denied-race-to-the-top-funding-for-third-time/3552#.U1q4L1e4GZQ>.

⁶⁴Hsieh, Jeremy. “Alaska Opts Out of Race to the Top.” Anchorage Daily News, May 8, 2010.

⁶⁵Letter from Governor Sean Parnell to the State School Board of Education and Department of Education and Early Development. 2012. Available at: http://gov.alaska.gov/parnell_media/resources_files/board112112.pdf.

⁶⁶“Measuring up to the Model: Alaska.” National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2013. Available at: <http://www.publiccharters.org/get-the-facts/law-database/states/AK/>.

⁶⁷Governor Sean Parnell, 2014 State of the State Address. Available at: <http://gov.alaska.gov/parnell/press-room/full-press-release.html?pr=6713>.

⁶⁸Caldwell, Suzanna. “In Alaska, charter schools straddle the line between public, private education.” *Alaska Dispatch*, February 8, 2014.; Forgey, Pat. “Education bill prioritizes funding hike for special programs over per-student funds.” *Alaska Dispatch*, April 18, 2014.

⁶⁹See, for example: Jenny Anderson, “Curious Grade for Teachers: Nearly All Pass,” *New York Times*, March 30, 2013; and Stephen Sawchuk, “Teachers’ Ratings Still High Despite New Measures,” *Education Week*, February 5, 2013.

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