



## New Jersey Governor Says Minor Paperwork Error Unfairly Cost State Millions in Education Money

**Governor Christie Wants Explanation While Department of Education Says "Time's Up, Pencils Down"**

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A day after the Obama administration announced the 10 winners in the second round of the ["Race To The Top"](#) education competition, one state that was left out of the group has some pretty big issues with the decision.

[New Jersey Governor Chris Christie](#) went on a tear today, saying that his state, which came in 11th in the competition was unfairly kept out of the top 10 slots. Christie brought the large, two-binder, 1,000-page application with him to a press conference today admitting that his state made a clerical error in its application. But that single error should not keep them from getting a piece of the nearly \$400 million dollars of federal funding.

"If you're a normal thinking breathing human being you pick up the phone and you say hey, you sent this wrong piece of paper can we get the information?" asked Christie at a press conference today.

New Jersey was docked 4.8 points for incorrectly giving budget information for the wrong years. Instead of submitting budget data for 2008 and 2009, New Jersey sent information for 2010 and 2011. While it was a minor mistake, with only a minor deduction, it was enough to put them lower than the state of Ohio - by 1.8 points to be exact.

The mistake was made by a mid-level official at the State Department of New Jersey. While Christie acknowledges that the mistake was their fault, he believes that the Obama administration should have given his state a chance to correct the mistake.

"Does anybody in DC have a lick of common sense? Pick up the phone and ask us for the number," said Christie, adding "Are you guys just down there checking boxes like mindless drones?"

The Department of Education however is sticking to its decision. In a statement to ABC News officials said, "New Jersey has a lot to be proud of and we look forward to working with them on what we hope will be round 3 of race to the top. In this round of race to the top, we believe the application requirements were very clear. A state that wanted to compete had to give us the correct information by the application deadline. This was not an open ended process. At some point, we had to say time's up, pencils down."

Losing this money is a big blow to a state that used almost all of its education stimulus in one budget year. But some say that just because New Jersey needs the money doesn't mean they should get to

correct mistakes.

"if you can't fill out your application correctly there is some indication that maybe you don't have the apparatus in place or the competence to execute the money that you could win," said Neal McCluskey, from the Cato Institute.

While not happy about how this turned out, Gov. Christie has promised he will not let the staff member who made the mistake take any public blame.

"If you think for a minute I'm going to fire some mid-level person who is putting this application together because they put one wrong piece of paper in then you don't know me," said Christie. "Wanna take shots? Take shots at me."

New Jersey was one of 35 states and the District of Columbia to apply for a portion of the \$3.4 billion remaining in the competition. That list was then winnowed down to 19 finalists last month.

States were judged on their proposals to adopt the department's reform goals. Those goals include: embracing common academic standards, improving teacher quality, creating educational data systems, and turning around their lowest-performing schools.

Common threads among the 10 winners announced today include bold approaches to turning around low-performing schools and teacher evaluations systems. All the winners also adopted common academic standards.

The 10 winners were decided based on the scores they received from peer-review panels. All the winners received a score of more than 440 out of a possible 500. In the first phase of the competition, only the two winners, Delaware and Tennessee scored above 440.

The decision to limit the winners to 10 states was based on the amount of funding available.

### **'Race to the Top': Education Experts Question Why Other States Didn't Make the Cut**

New Jersey's not the only state excluded from the top 10 that has some people asking questions.

"I think it's a disaster for the administration that Louisiana and Colorado are not on the list. Some very mediocre states got funded and some of the leading states for education reform did not," said Mike Petrilli of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute.

He said that the Education Department should have overruled the scorings of the peer review panels when it came to these two states, both of which were announced as finalists.

Rick Hess of the American Enterprise Institute agreed.

"I think the exclusion of Louisiana and Colorado suggest legitimate concern over the way the program was conceived, the criteria that was designed and the judging that was executed," he said in a written statement.

Although Colorado and Louisiana are often praised for their reform and innovation, both states failed to get widespread union support for their proposals.

"The dynamic here is the unions are going to be able to claim that they beat this in Colorado and they won a victory," Petrilli said.

At the official announcement yesterday Duncan reiterated that he wished he could have funded more states, but that he trusted the process.

"There are a number of states that I would have loved to have funded, and we just simply didn't have the resources to do that. That's why it's so important that we continue to come back and have a round three and a round four," Duncan said. "We did not take anyone out of rank order. It's been a very fair and impartial process. I give our peer reviewers great, great credit."

The education secretary also made clear that the department will withhold funding from any winners who do not follow through with their proposed reforms.

"These are your dollars and my dollar. These are taxpayer dollars, and every single dollar we want spent extraordinarily wisely. ... If at the end of the day we have a feeling that a state is not acting in good faith or simply doesn't have the capacity or the will or the courage to implement their plans, we're absolutely prepared to stop funding a state where we don't think that's a good investment of scarce taxpayer dollars," Duncan explained.

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