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Hawaii teachers reject contract in 'blow' to Race to the Top

By [Valerie Strauss](#)

Correction: An earlier version misstated the number of people who voted on the contract. It is 9,000.

Public school teachers in Hawaii have rejected a contract that called for a move to a [performance-based evaluation and compensation system](#), as required by the Race to the Top grant that the state won from the Obama administration.

The rejection comes shortly after [Hawaii was warned](#) by the U.S. Department of Education that its \$75 million Race to the Top grant had been put on "high-risk status" — the first state to be so sanctioned — because it had not moved quickly enough to implement specific reforms.

Sixty-seven percent of about 9,000 teachers, counselors and others represented by the Hawaii State Teachers Association opposed the contract, which was seen as a way to move Race to the Top efforts forward and improve its status with Washington. It was the first time in the organization's 44-year history that members rejected a contract that had been approved by its board, [according to the Honolulu Civil Beat](#).

The Honolulu Civil Beat put this headline on a story it ran announcing the defeat of the contract proposal: "*Hawaii Teachers Vote a Stunning Blow For Race to the Top*"

Race to the Top is the administration's signature education initiative, a \$4 billion-plus contest in which states and districts have competed for a slice of the money in exchange for implementing school reform policies favored by the department. Those include expanding charter schools and evaluating teachers in part on the basis of students' standardized test scores. Twenty-one states plus the District of Columbia have been awarded grants through several rounds of Race to the Top. Hawaii won \$75 million but could lose its grant (a few million dollars have already been spent) if the department is not satisfied with the pace of reform there.

Education Department officials told Gov. Neil Abercrombie (D) in a recent letter that the progress the state had made in implementing reforms in the first 14 months of the grant had been "unsatisfactory." Federal officials are planning to visit Hawaii early this year to do an on-site evaluation of Race to the Top compliance.

The proposed contract called for a new evaluation system for teachers that would be partly based on student growth, a controversial approach because there are many factors that influence a student's academic performance and teasing out how much a teacher is responsible is very difficult. The formulas that are usually used to do this rely on standardized test scores earned by students and [are not sophisticated](#)

[enough](#) to be valid or fair, [assessment experts say](#), although policymakers have forged ahead with these systems anyway.

But the contract proposal, according to several Hawaii newspapers, did not actually spell out the details of how the new evaluation system would work. It would, however, have reversed a 5 percent pay reduction that went into effect last year.

Hawaii may be having the biggest trouble among Race to the Top recipients satisfying the Education Department, but it isn't the only one; implementation in several states is slow.

[The Associated Press reported earlier this month](#) that reports issued by states detailing their progress in the first year of their Race to the Top grant showed that most of them were behind schedule with implementation. New York and Florida were having the most serious problems aside from Hawaii, the AP said.