



SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

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March 31, 2010

Dr. Thelma Meléndez, Assistant Secretary
Elementary and Secondary Education
US Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20202

Re: Request for Waiver of 25% Carry-Forward Requirement

Dear Assistant Secretary Meléndez:

I am writing to request a waiver for the 25% carry-forward requirement for the state of Washington, contained in section II.B.9 of the final requirements for the School Improvement Grants (SIG) program (74 FR 65618 (Dec. 10, 2009)) and under section II.B.9 of the final requirements, as amended (75 FR 3375 (Jan. 21, 2010)).

Background

Washington State identified a total of 47 schools in 27 local educational agencies (LEAs) that make up our persistently lowest-achieving schools. A total of 21 LEAs applied for SIG funding in this voluntary process, comprising 41 of the 47 persistently lowest achieving schools identified. Of these 41 schools making application for SIG funds, 25 schools are identified as Tier I and 16 schools are Tier II.

Washington applied for the three-year waiver for an extended timeframe to use these 09-10 SIG ARRA funds, approving the use of these 09-10 SIG ARRA funds through September 30, 2013. This will enable us to impact a greater number of schools over a timeframe that will promote sustainability in these highly committed schools and districts. Within this three-year period, we project that approximately 40% of the funding will be allocated to these persistently lowest achieving schools in Year 1 (2010-11), with 35% and 25% allocated in years 2 and 3 respectively. This tiered declining funding model will assist with the reduction of a projected funding cliff at the end of this three-year period and will assist the chosen schools/districts in their plans and subsequent actions to promote sustainability of these turnaround efforts.

Washington SIG Award for 2009-10

Washington will shortly receive a total of \$42.5 million in SY 2009-10 SIG ARRA funding. An additional \$7.7 million in regular 1003(g) funds for SY 2009-10, previously held back by ED, will also be made available. These funds will be focused on the provision of turnaround services to the schools identified as our persistently lowest achieving and volunteering to implement one of the four turnaround models.

Identified Need

A source of pride for Washington State is that, of the 47 schools in the 27 LEAs identified as the persistently lowest achieving, a total of 41 schools in 21 LEAs made application to participate in this highly competitive, bold and disruptive change process. This demonstrates a high level of

commitment and readiness to respond to the needs of the students served in these lowest achieving schools.

In the past two weeks, we have reviewed, scored and further vetted these SIG applications based on level of commitment, capacity and readiness to engage in the turnaround efforts identified. A total of approximately \$49 million in funding was requested by the 41 schools for the first year of SIG implementation.

Based on our projected funding formula for the allocation of SIG ARRA funds over the three-year waiver period, our tiered declining funding model identifies approximately \$47.7 in funds available, with \$19.1m available in year 1 (40%); 16.7m in year 2 (35%); and \$11.9m available in year 3 (25%).

25% Carry Forward Impact

Based on our work to rapidly provide these funds in a drastically condensed timeline, and aligning this work with the current district and school realities, we have identified 19 schools (in 9 LEAs) that are poised to do the work necessary to turn around their persistently lowest-achieving schools. This amounts to approximately 40% of the schools that originally applied for SIG funding.

Of the 19 schools moving forward in this application process, 9 are identified as Tier I schools and 10 are identified as Tier II. These schools represent all grade spans (elementary, middle and high school), located in large, medium and small districts throughout the state. Further refinement of their application and budget requests will be conducted with finalized applications and SIG awards available to schools/LEAs projected by April 26th.

Reducing the total funds available for Cohort I of SIG-funded schools by 25% (approximately \$12m) significantly reduces our capacity to engage with the number of schools identified, within this three-year waiver window. Our ability to support this bold and disruptive change process in those schools that have volunteered and shown a high level of capacity, commitment and readiness to address their turnaround needs will be negatively impacted. Schools that have volunteered and are projected for funding have made the essential preparations, including initiating necessary changes in school leadership and staff in anticipation of receiving a SIG grant award.

25% Carry Forward Waiver

Whereas we understand that the intent of the 25% carryover is to serve a second cohort of persistently low-achieving schools, we were presented with a greater number of promising proposals to adopt one of the four Federal models than can be funded. The 25% carryover reduces our capacity to help create a dramatically improved learning for some of state's neediest students starting next year. If we fail to distribute these funds this year, waiting to identify a second cohort of schools, these students are forced to wait one more year to get the academic supports they need to be successful.

We cannot forget the school board member from one of our lowest achieving schools who had difficulty speaking as his eyes filled with tears, describing his fifth grade son who cannot read

and is now hating school. His community, with 67% unemployment, sees its identification as a Tier I school as an incredible opportunity to turn things around for its kids. It has used this identification as a catalyst to create collaboration between the local tribe, local community college, teachers, their union, and parent educational partners. We, as the SEA, feel compelled to respond with equal urgency.

Must we hold these funds back until this school is again identified next year as a persistently low-achieving school? Must we waste the energy, excitement and collaboration created in these communities? Must we tell this father to wait one more year until his son can get the services he so desperately needs?

Based on the information presented, we respectfully request that the Department waive this carry forward requirement for Washington State.

Washington assures that it provided all LEAs in the State that are identified to receive a SIG grant with notice and a reasonable opportunity to comment on this request and has attached a copy of that notice. To expedite its waiver request, Washington will submit subsequently copies of any comments it receives from LEAs. Washington also assures that it provided notice and information regarding this waiver request to the public in the manner in which the State customarily provides such notice and information to the public (*e.g.*, by publishing a notice in the newspaper; by posting information on its website) and has attached a copy of, or link to, that notice.

Please feel free to contact me by phone or email at (253) 571-3538 or janell.newman@k12.wa.us if you have any questions regarding this request. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Janell Newman

Janell Newman, Ph.D.
Assistant Superintendent
District and School Improvement and Accountability

cc: Carlas McCauley, Educational Program Specialist

JN:jc