



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

SEP 25 2015

The Honorable Michael E. Hanson
Superintendent
Fresno Unified School District
2309 Tulare Street
Fresno, CA 93721

Dear Superintendent Hanson:

I am writing in response to the request of the California Office to Reform Education (CORE) on behalf of your district and five other districts to extend approval of the districts' request for waivers under section 9401 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended (ESEA), to carry out significant education reforms. (For ease of reference, the collective districts are referred to as the CORE districts and the collective request of the six districts is referred to as the CORE districts' request hereafter.)

Our team, including my staff and other senior leaders at the U.S. Department of Education (ED), reviewed the CORE districts' request dated September 2, 2015. Pursuant to section 9401(d)(2) of the ESEA, I am pleased to renew approval of the CORE districts' request through the end of the 2015–2016 school year, subject to the below condition.

My decision to renew approval of the CORE districts' request is based on my determination that the waivers have been effective in enabling each of the CORE districts to carry out reforms to improve student achievement and that this extension is in the public interest. With this renewal, the CORE districts will be able to continue implementing their plans to promote innovative, locally tailored strategies to improve educational outcomes for all students, close achievement gaps, increase equity, and improve the quality of instruction. The CORE districts' approved request will be posted on ED's website.

This letter also provides my approval of the CORE districts' proposed amendments to their request. A summary of the CORE districts' significant approved amendments is enclosed with this letter.

The CORE districts' original request and extension were approved subject to two conditions. The CORE districts were required to submit to ED for review and approval: (1) an amended request incorporating the final version of the new School Quality Improvement System (SQIS); and (2) final guidelines for teacher and principal evaluation and support systems. I have determined that CORE submitted the districts' final guidelines for teacher and principal

400 MARYLAND AVE., SW, WASHINGTON, DC 20202
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evaluation and support systems that each CORE district will use to continually improve instruction; meaningfully differentiate performance using at least three performance levels; determine performance levels using multiple valid measures, including as a significant factor data on student growth for all students (including English learners and students with disabilities) and other measures of professional practice; evaluate teachers and principals on a regular basis; provide clear, timely, and useful feedback, including feedback that identifies needs and guides professional development; and inform personnel decisions. The CORE districts have continued to work with ED on their differentiated recognition, accountability, and support system, but have not submitted the final version of the new SQIS. As a result, I am continuing the condition for the CORE districts to submit to ED for review and approval an amended request incorporating the final version of the School Quality Improvement Index (SQII), a central component of the SQIS.

The CORE districts were also placed on high-risk status through the end of the 2014–2015 school year because, at that time of extension, the CORE districts had not met either of their two conditions and because of the scope of changes the CORE districts had proposed through amendments to their request. Because the CORE districts have resolved the condition requiring final guidelines for their teacher and principal evaluation and support systems, have demonstrated substantial progress in finalizing the SQII, have continued to work with ED to resolve all of the monitoring findings from ED's February 2014 monitoring visit, and have demonstrated an ongoing commitment to continuous improvement, I am removing the CORE districts from high-risk status.

The decision to renew approval of the CORE districts' request for one year is based upon the fact that the CORE districts are in the process of transitioning to their new system of recognition, accountability, and support — the SQIS — which the CORE districts intend to use to identify their Priority, Focus, and Reward schools beginning in the 2016–2017 school year. To receive approval to implement their waiver request after the 2015–2016 school year, the CORE districts must resolve the above condition through the following:

- Submit to ED, by January 15, 2016, an amendment on the how the SQII will incorporate the social emotional (non-cognitive) skills and culture-climate surveys.
- Submit to ED, by November 1, 2016, an amended request that incorporates the final version of the SQII, including a demonstration that the SQII will allow the CORE districts to identify the requisite number of Priority, Focus and Reward schools consistent with CORE's wavier request.

The CORE districts should also include, by attaching to the amended request, any technical documentation, administrative rules, and other relevant information related to the SQII, as appropriate.

If the CORE districts submit the above-referenced amendment regarding how the SQII will incorporate the social emotional skills and culture-climate surveys, are able to demonstrate they are on track to address the above condition, make no additional changes to their approved waiver request, and are otherwise continuing to fulfill the commitments in their waiver request, I will consider the CORE districts' waiver request for additional years.

In addition, this renewal is subject to the CORE districts' commitment to:

- Demonstrate, during ED’s monitoring and follow-up, that the CORE districts are implementing the plan set forth in the waiver request to ensure that Focus schools that have not met the CORE districts’ exit criteria will be prepared to implement more rigorous interventions by the start of the 2016–2017 school year.

On May 29, 2015, the CORE districts also submitted for ED’s consideration a list of readiness criteria they would use to determine if additional districts are ready to join the waiver for the 2016–2017 school year, after they go through a preparation process in the 2015–2016 school year. The request included a proposed plan for preparing districts to join CORE and readying districts to implement the provisions of the waiver. While ED is not approving any additional waiver requests for districts to join CORE at this time, ED is committed to working with the CORE districts on the implementation of the readiness criteria and to ensure that any additional districts are truly ready to implement college- and career-ready standards, high-quality, aligned assessments, the SQIS, and teacher and principal evaluation and support systems that use CORE’s guidelines. ED will consider requests to add additional districts prior to the start of the 2016–2017 school year.

The CORE districts continue to have an affirmative responsibility to ensure that they are in compliance with Federal civil rights laws that prohibit discrimination based on race, color, national origin, sex, disability, and age in their implementation of their waiver request. These laws include Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, and requirements under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

I am confident that the CORE districts will continue to implement the reforms described in their approved request and advance their efforts to hold schools accountable for the achievement of all students. If you need any additional assistance to implement your approved request, please do not hesitate to contact Rachael Tutwiler-Fortune or Supreet Anand of my staff at: Rachael.TutwilerFortune@ed.gov or Supreet.Anand@ed.gov.

Thank you for your continued focus on enhancing education for Fresno's children.

Sincerely,

(b)(6)

Ann Whalen
Delegated the authority to perform the functions
and duties of Assistant Secretary for Elementary
and Secondary Education

Enclosure

cc: Rick Miller, Executive Director, California Office to Reform Education

Approved Amendments to the CORE Districts' Waiver Request

The following is a summary of approved amendments to the CORE districts' request for waivers under section 9401 of the ESEA. Please refer to ED's website (<http://www2.ed.gov/nclb/freedom/local/flexibility/waiverletters2009/index.html#ca>) for the CORE districts' complete waiver request.

- **State-Developed Differentiated Recognition, Accountability, and Support (Principle 2)**

Revision: The CORE districts amended their differentiated recognition, accountability, and support system so that a school that has an assessment participation rate lower than 95 percent for either the all students group or any ESEA subgroup will not have met its Annual Measurable Objective (AMO).

Revision: The CORE districts amended the request so that other Title I schools that have not met the CORE AMO for two years are added to the Communities of Practice after results from the 2015–2016 school year assessments are released.