



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY SECRETARY

February 2011

The Department appreciates the complex nature of the Race to the Top Assessment proposals and the consortia's commitment to build "next generation" assessment systems. The Department will hold each consortium accountable for implementing its plan by measuring progress against the goals, activities, and timelines in the approved plans.

As a condition of the grant award, each consortium must keep the Department apprised of changes to the approved plan and timeline, such as changes to dates by which contracts will be awarded or key products delivered to consortium members. This includes changes specified in 34 CFR 80.30 in the Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR), such as changes to key personnel. It also includes any changes to the budget greater than \$100,000, such as for transfers among direct cost categories and among separately budgeted programs, projects, functions, or activities. The Department has the authority to approve amendments to approved project plans, provided that such revisions (a) do not result in a failure to comply with the terms and conditions of the award and the program's statutory and regulatory provisions; (b) do not change the overall scope and objectives of the funded application; and (c) are mutually agreed upon (in writing) between the Department and the consortium.

For any substantive change to the approved plan, a consortium must submit:

- A brief summary of the proposed change;
- The rationale for the change;
- The impact that the proposed change would have on the approved plan, including whether there are changes to the timeline or deliverables and outcomes of the approved plan;
- The impact of the proposed change on the overall or project or program budget; and
- An assurance that the proposed change would not hinder or impede the consortium's overall ability to deliver on the proposed assessment system in its original application and meet the absolute priority included in the notice inviting applications (NIA) to apply for a Race to the Top Assessment grant (see below).

Substantive changes to the approved plan, timeline, and budget must be submitted to the Department for review and approval *prior* to being implemented. The Department will post on its website letters summarizing approved amendment requests along with the rationale for the change.

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The Department of Education's mission is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access.

The Department will consider the consortium's rationale for the change and its impact on the approved plan. Ultimately, each consortium will be held responsible for meeting the absolute priority specified in the NIA. Any proposed change will be reviewed in light of the requirement that there be an operational assessment system in place during the 2014-2015 school year that—

1. Measures student knowledge and skills against a common set of college- and career-ready standards (as defined in the NIA) in mathematics and English language arts in a way that—
 - a. Covers the full range of those standards, including standards against which student achievement has traditionally been difficult to measure;
 - b. As appropriate, elicits complex student demonstrations or applications of knowledge and skills;
 - c. Provides an accurate measure of student achievement across the full performance continuum, including for high- and low-achieving students; and
 - d. Provides an accurate measure of student growth over a full academic year or course;
2. Consists of assessment components in mathematics and in English language arts that include, for each subject, one or more summative assessment components that—
 - a. Are administered at least once during the academic year in grades 3 through 8 and at least once in high school; and
 - b. Produce student achievement data and student growth data (both as defined in the NIA) that can be used to determine whether individual students are college- and career-ready (as defined in the NIA) or on track to being college- and career-ready (as defined in the NIA);
3. Assesses all students, including English learners (as defined in the NIA) and students with disabilities (as defined in the NIA); and
4. Produces data, including student achievement data and student growth data, that can be used to inform—
 - a. Determinations of school effectiveness for purposes of accountability under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended (ESEA);
 - b. Determinations of individual principal and teacher effectiveness for purposes of evaluation;
 - c. Determinations of principal and teacher professional development and support needs; and
 - d. Teaching, learning, and program improvement.

The new assessment systems being developed by the Race to the Top Assessment consortia are vital to helping meet the ambitious goal laid out by President Obama – to ensure that every student leaves high school with the skills necessary to succeed in college and the workforce and, by 2020, to restore the United States' place as the world leader in the number of college graduates. The Department is committed to supporting the consortia as they help the Nation meet this challenge.