



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY SECRETARY

September 25, 2014

The Honorable Vincent C. Gray  
Executive Office of the Mayor  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Suite 316  
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Mayor Gray:

I am writing in response to District of Columbia's Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE)'s request to amend its approved Race to the Top grant project, including revisions to the project period to implement a portion of its plan. Between July 15 and September 22, 2014, OSSE submitted documentation to and held conversations with the U.S. Department of Education (Department) to support amendment requests to its approved Race to the Top plan. As you are aware, the Department has the authority to approve amendments to your plan and budget, provided the revisions do not change the overall scope and objectives of the approved proposal. In March 2013, the Department issued "Amendment Requests with No-Cost Extension Guidance and Principles" indicating the process by which amendments containing requests to provide additional time for a grantee to accomplish the reform goals and deliverables it committed to in its Race to the Top application and approved Scope of Work would be reviewed. To determine whether approval could be granted, the Department has applied the conditions and elements specific to no-cost extensions noted in the document, and compared it with the Race to the Top program *Principles* included in the "Grant Amendment Submission Process" document issued to Governors of grantee States in October 2011.

Based on review of OSSE's amendment request and project-level work plan, I approve the following amendment for sub-criterion (E)(2) Statewide System of Support (SSOS), including extension of the time period for implementation, subject to the conditions described below.

OSSE will expand on its current work in sub-criterion (E)(2): Turning around the lowest-achieving schools and implement a SSOS that enables the agency to build effective relationships and provide targeted support to priority and focus schools<sup>i</sup>, aimed at raising student achievement in the District's lowest-achieving schools. OSSE's SSOS includes a four-pronged approach: 1) adopt a local educational agency (LEA) support team model utilizing cross-agency staff at OSSE to strengthen implementation of outcomes-driven, progress-monitoring reviews to evaluate and support improvement activities of priority, focus, and School Improvement Grant

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(SIG) schools; 2) convene three annual LEA Support Institutes to provide training and support to all LEAs with required participation from SIG schools and highly encouraged participation from priority and focus schools; 3) contract with vendors to provide onsite, data-driven technical assistance to priority schools, support LEAs and school leaders in the implementation of the Common Core State Standards and research-based interventions, and lend onsite coaching and coordination of job-alike collaboration; and 4) award approximately ten competitive grants to LEAs or schools for dissemination of best practices. OSSE will define metrics in fall 2014 to measure the effectiveness of this approach. These metrics will determine the activities with the highest impact and inform future plans.

Budget Implications: OSSE shifts \$1,831,074<sup>ii</sup> from unallocated Year 4 funds to multiple budget line items in Year 5 to implement an SSOS. Specifically, shift \$175,825 to year 5 personnel and associated cost categories to fund one full-time employee to support school improvement efforts across the agency. Shift \$1,155,249 to Year 5 contractual to fund multiple vendor contracts to: (1) coordinate the LEA Support Team Model and implementation of the Learning Support Network; (2) develop an interactive web-based portal aligned with the LEA Support Team Model linked to LearnDC.org that will serve as the online location for tools and resources associated with the LEA Institutes; and (3) support and coordinate OSSE's monitoring of priority and focus schools, including data analysis, production of materials to support oversight, and meeting facilitation. Finally, shift \$500,000 to Year 5 funding for involved LEAs for the best practices dissemination grants.

Conditions: As a condition of approval for this project OSSE must submit to the Department:

1. The request for proposals for the best practice dissemination grants once released and no later than November 15, 2014;
2. The final performance measures and targets for the SSOS by December 1, 2014; and
3. By April 1, 2015, a report of the progress of these initiatives against the defined performance measures including an analysis of the impact of activities within the SSOS.

OSSE must ensure that the activities in the SSOS project remain aligned with its commitments in its approved Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) flexibility request as well as its approved application for School Improvement Grants.

Additionally, due to the lack of oversight and spending against sub-criterion (E)(2) activities in OSSE's approved application, the Department remains concerned about OSSE's oversight of its Race to the Top turnaround work and capacity for implementing activities and expending funds against its approved plan, budget and timeline. Therefore, the Department will maintain the cost reimbursement basis on sub-criterion (E)(2) activities until OSSE demonstrates a successful track record of expenditures and implementation of activities aligned to the approved project-level work plans.

As described in the May 1, 2014, amendment approval letter, the Department indicated that it generally approves the OSSE's process to review LEA subgrant requests to obligate and liquidate funds after September 23, 2014.

It is our understanding that these amendments and no-cost extensions will not result in a change in OSSE's performance measures and outcomes, nor will they substantially change the scope and objectives of the work. Please note that we expect grantees with no-cost extensions to

liquidate all funds by September 1, 2015, given that by law all Race to the Top funds revert to the U.S. Department of Treasury as of October 1, 2015. OSSE must request and receive approval to move forward with no-cost extensions for any additional projects. This letter will be posted on the Department's website as a record of the amendment.

If you need any assistance or have any questions regarding Race to the Top, please do not hesitate to contact OSSE's Race to the Top Program Officer, Ariel Jacobs, at 202-453-7025 or [ariel.jacobs@ed.gov](mailto:ariel.jacobs@ed.gov).

Sincerely,

//s//

Patrick Rooney  
Acting Director, Policy and Program Implementation  
Implementation and Support Unit

cc: Jesus Aguirre, State Superintendent of Education  
Abigail Smith, Deputy Mayor for Education  
Sharon Gaskins, Deputy Assistant Superintendent for Accountability, Performance and Support

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<sup>i</sup> As defined by OSSE's approved Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965 (ESEA) Flexibility Plan.

<sup>ii</sup> See Amendment 7 (<http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/amendments/district-of-columbia-7.pdf>) and Amendment 8 (<http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/amendments/district-of-columbia-8.pdf>) approval letters, identifying \$1,831,074 in unallocated funds within sub-criterion (E)(2) project budget as well as placing the entire (E)(2) budget of \$6,273,300 on cost reimbursement basis until OSSE submits an approvable work plan and budget.