



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY SECRETARY

November 18, 2011

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 the District of Columbia's request to amend its approved Race to the Top grant project. On November 7, 2011, the State submitted amendment requests to the U.S. Department of Education (the Department). As you are aware, the Department has the authority to approve amendments to your plan and budget, provided that such changes do not alter the scope or objectives of the approved proposal. On October 4, 2011, the Department sent a letter and revised "Grant Amendment Submission Process" document to Governors of grantee States indicating the process by which amendments would be reviewed and approved or denied. To determine whether approval could be granted, the Department has applied the conditions noted in the document, and compared it with the Race to the Top program *Principles*, which are also included in that document. To determine whether approval could be granted, the Department has applied the conditions noted in the document, and compared it with the Race to the Top program *Principles*, which are also included in that document.

I am pleased to approve the following amendments:

- For (A)(2), Building Strong Statewide Capacity to Implement, Scale-up and Sustain Proposed Plans:
 - Add two program analysts for years 2 through 4 responsible for project management of the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) and charter turnaround efforts consistent with the plan set out in the original application and any other Race to the Top tasks as needed. The State believes that adding the two program analysts will contribute to enhanced leadership capacity moving forward. The total costs for these positions, \$491,400, include fringe benefits and indirect costs over three years. The funds come from the reallocation of personnel funds that resulted from year 1 vacancies.
 - Shift \$500,000 from year 1 to year 2 and shift the final timeframe from October 2011 to April 2012 to complete the special education quality assessment project. The Department understands that this project will support a comprehensive assessment (conducted by OSSE) of special education programs at DCPS and charter schools in order to identify effective practices, disseminate information about these practices, and create special education quality data dashboards (Star Rating systems) that allow for transparent information about program quality in each LEA. The State felt that community input was critical to the planning process, and therefore spent more time than initially proposed in its application to design the project and solicit feedback from relevant stakeholders.
- For (B)(3), Supporting the Transition to Enhanced Standards:

- Shift \$436,794 from year 1 to year 2 to complete Common Core State Standards (CCSS) resource website due to contracting delays. Once live, the State believes the website will serve as a one-stop source of CCSS materials and information for students, families, school personnel, and community members within the District of Columbia.
- Shift \$400,000 from year 1 to year 2 to complete the *Standards Entry Points for Differentiated Learning* manual. According to the State, the manual will link standards to a list of activities ranging in difficulty, which will help ensure that every student receives instruction that is challenging but accessible. The State originally proposed to develop this resource by June 2011, but the consortium developing the manual (of which OSSE is a member) fell behind and did not complete the manual until September 2011. The consortium's delay prohibited OSSE from issuing a contract for delivery of professional development in fiscal year 2011; instead, it will now begin in December 2011.
- Shift the timeframe for both finalizing State-level education research priorities and soliciting researchers from March 2011 to February 2012. The State's Race to the Top team needed the new OSSE administration (new superintendent, assistant superintendent, special education director, and data director) to approve the final research priorities. The State expects OSSE leadership to approve the research priorities in early 2012 after the newly hired data director meets with the other members of OSSE's administration involved in the decision-making process.
- For (D)(2), Improving Teacher and Principal Effectiveness Based on Performance:
 - Shift \$1,000,000 from year 1 to years 2 through 4 to build data systems to support the student growth measure and shift the timeframe from October 2010-September 2011 to October 2010-November 2011. The State originally intended to award the \$1,000,000 to contractors late in year 1, but did so early in year 2 because OSSE experienced delays in modifying the contract. The State does not expect this delay to negatively impact the project as the contractor should still be able to provide the data necessary at the end of SY11-12 for teacher evaluations as originally planned.
 - Shift the timeframe for reviewing and approving LEA teacher and principal evaluation plans from August 2011 to December 2011. The State failed to meet its initial timeframe and requested an extension in order to complete the review process. As of October 27, 2011, the State had received plans from 25 out of 30 participating LEAs (and approved 11 of these). The State attributes the delay to capacity challenges at smaller LEAs and the lengthy iterative process required by the peer review and approval process but notes that LEAs have begun to implement their plans.
- For (D)(4), Improving the Effectiveness of Teacher and Principal Preparation Programs:
 - Shift \$250,000 from year 1 to year 2 and shift the timeframe from April 2011-June 2011 to August 2011-May 2012 for developing the Teacher Preparation Program Scorecards. The State attributes this project's delay to internal staff turnover.
- For (D)(5), Providing Effective Support to Teachers and Principals:
 - Shift the timeframe from December 2010-January 2012 to June 2011-August 2013 for developing an individualized professional development platform. DCPS is responsible for this contract and it published the RFP six months late. DCPS selected a vendor who began working in August 2011. DCPS teachers will still be able to access Phase I of the platform in January 2012 (as originally scheduled), but additional content will not be available until mid-2012 (originally January 2012) and charter LEAs will not be able to access the platform until August 2013 (originally scheduled for March 2012).
- For (E)(2), Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools:
 - Shift the timeframe from December 2010-January 2011 to December 2010-November 2011 for providing preparation support for turnaround teams. In the State's original application, DCPS was scheduled to hire central office staff to support in-school turnaround teams by January 2011. Because OSSE did not budget Race to the Top funding for DCPS turnaround efforts until year 2, DCPS did not complete hiring central office turnaround staff until October 2011. DCPS still provided support for turnaround teams, but their

larger central office turnaround staff will allow them to provide more targeted support to individual schools.

In addition, I would like to clarify an error made in our last amendment approval letter, dated March 4, 2011. In that letter, for Project (D)(5), which involves supplemental grant funding for LEAs participating in the Professional Learning Communities of Effectiveness (PLaCEs) program, the State requested the opportunity to correct an error in its budget in order to align the duration of grant funding with the Race to the Top grant period, which ends in 2014. Our approval noted, "The resulting change will ensure that both the 2011 and 2012 sub-awards of funding last for two years...." Our typographical error implied that both the 2011 and 2012 grants would be for two years, but the State has clarified that the earlier round of funding, in 2011, will in fact last for three years, until 2014. We are pleased to make this clarification.

It is our understanding that the amendments will not result in a change in your State's performance measures and outcomes, nor will they substantially change the scope of work. Please note that this letter will be posted on the Department's website as a record of the amendments.

I am confident that the District of Columbia will continue its bold, comprehensive reform efforts. If you need any assistance or have any questions regarding Race to the Top, please do not hesitate to contact your Race to the Top Program Officer, Rachel Gibson, at 202-453-5545 or rachel.gibson@ed.gov.

Sincerely,

Ann Whalen

Director, Policy and Program Implementation
Implementation and Support Unit

cc:

Hosanna Mahaley, State Superintendent

Kayleen Irizarry, Assistant Superintendent of Education

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