



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY SECRETARY

October 31, 2012

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 (District) request to amend its approved Race to the Top grant project. Between June 16, 2012 and October 23, 2012, the State submitted amendment requests to the U.S. Department of Education (Department). As you are aware, the Department has the authority to approve amendments to your plan and budget, provided that such a change does 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.

I approve the following amendments:

- 1) For section (D)(4), Improving the Effectiveness of Teacher and Principal Preparation Programs:

The District has requested to shift the completion date of its Teacher Preparation Program Scorecard templates from its amended timeline of May 2012 to January 2013. The District was originally supposed to develop the scorecards during April 2011-June 2011 and attributed the original delay to internal staff turnover. The Department approved an amendment to shift the timeframe to August 2011-May 2012. This second shift, however, is a result of delays in the contracting process. The District will shift \$250,000 from its Year 2 budget to its Year 3 budget to complete the scorecard templates in January 2013.

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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.*

It is our understanding that this amendment will not substantially change the scope of work and that it will not affect the District's relevant performance measure: By fall 2014, aggregated information on effectiveness of graduates of teaching programs will be publicly available. Provided the District meets its current timeline, the Teacher Prep Program Scorecard templates will be complete by January 2013 and the District will pilot the scorecards with preparation programs for one year before releasing scorecards.

2) For section (E)(2), Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools:

The District has requested an amendment to change its approach to aligning school modernization efforts to support school turnaround. In its approved application, the District committed to holding quarterly meetings between the Mayor's Office and DCPS to align the timeline for modernization of specific schools with DCPS school intervention plans. OSSE no longer facilitates quarterly meetings with the Mayor's Office and DCPS to align school modernization efforts to support school intervention plans. The District published a multi-year school modernization plan early in the Race to the Top grant period and it does not provide for adaptation due to capital expenditure planning. DCPS includes the need for school modernization in its rubric for selecting schools to receive turnaround preparation support from the Race to the Top funded DCPS Office of School Improvement team.

It is our understanding that this amendment will not substantially change the scope of work and that it will not affect the District's relevant performance measures.

3) Graduation Rate Targets:

The District has requested an amendment to replace its original Race to the Top graduation targets with revised targets that align with those included in its Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Flexibility application, and transition to using the Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (cohort rate). In its approved Race to the Top plan, the District established graduation rate targets based on the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) "leaver" rate (i.e., students who "leave" the school system) and indicated that it planned to transition to a four-year cohort rate. The District originally set graduation targets for the Race to the Top program using the "leaver" rate; however it planned to track graduation using both methods throughout the life of the grant in order to monitor performance gains adequately.

The District requested and was approved on July 19, 2012, for an ESEA Flexibility waiver. As part of its approved request, the State set targets for cohort

graduation rates. The District has requested to align its Race to the Top graduation rate targets with the targets in its approved ESEA Flexibility request and to no longer report on the “leaver” rate. The approved ESEA Flexibility targets are set through school year 2016-2017, with interim targets for the intervening years. The District proposes that Race to the Top targets for school year 2012-2013 and school year 2013-2014 match the approved ESEA Flexibility targets (see table).

Year	Original Race to the Top Application “Leaver” Rate	Proposed Cohort Rate (as aligned with ESEA Flexibility Request)
2010-2011	58.58%	58.58%
2011-2012	61.58%	62.70%
2012-2013	64.58%	66.50%
2014-2015	67.58%	69.80%

Based on conversations between the District and the Department in summer 2012, I approve the State’s request to revise its graduation rate targets to align with those approved under ESEA flexibility. It is our understanding that this amendment will not substantially change the scope of work.

In addition to these amendments, I acknowledge the following delays in the District’s timeline:

1) For section (B)(3), Supporting the Transition to Enhanced Standards:

The District has requested to shift the launch of its Common Core State Standards (CCSS) resource website from its amended timeline of fall 2011 to fall 2012. The District was originally supposed to complete the CCSS resource website in year 1 of the grant, but the Department approved an amendment to shift completion of the CCSS resource website from year 1 to year 2. OSSE submitted the materials necessary for an RFP to the District’s contracting office in summer 2011, but due to workload issues, the contracting office could not issue the RFP until late 2011. OSSE completed the vendor selection process in the first half of 2012 and issued the contract in July 2012. OSSE reported that the CCSS resource website launched in September 2012.

2) For section (C)(2), Accessing and Using State Data:

The District has requested to shift the launch of its enhanced data website from its original timeline of October 2011 to fall 2012. OSSE planned to execute this portion of its Race to the Top application as part of its statewide longitudinal

data system (SLDS), but OSSE experienced delays with its SLDS project. Rather than rely on the SLDS, OSSE decided to create the enhanced functions on its data website in-house, and then include the same functions in its SLDS once that project is complete. In addition to other uses, OSSE will utilize these enhanced functions to its data website to facilitate discussions with community members on school performance data. OSSE originally planned to hold these meetings in late 2011; however OSSE, in conjunction with its assessment vendor, held the first of these meetings in October 2012.

3) For section (D)(5), Providing Effective Support to Teachers and Principals:

The District has requested to shift the award date for its second round of Professional Learning Communities for Effectiveness (PLaCEs) sub-grants from its original timeline of June 2012 to fall 2012. OSSE issued its second PLaCEs RFP according to its original timeline, but had quality concerns with the proposals it received. The proposals submitted did not have clear goals or implementation plans, appropriate budgets, or adequate family/community engagement. OSSE decided to give applicants the opportunity to improve their proposals, but also determined that it would be prudent to require applicants to present their proposals to OSSE in-person. OSSE awarded these sub-grants in September 2012, thereby allowing the projects to support educators through the vast majority of the 2012-2013 school year.

The District has requested to shift the launch of its individualized professional development (PD) platform from January 2012 to August 2012. The District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) is responsible for developing and administering the individualized PD platform. The first phase of this project was to give DCPS educators access to PD resources through this new platform. DCPS was originally supposed to launch Phase 1 of the platform with full content in January 2012 and provide access for charter LEAs in March 2012, but the Department approved an amendment postponing that date to August 2013. DCPS experienced procurement delays that prohibited the platform's launch in January 2012, but DCPS still gave educators access to PD resources through its existing Educator Portal. DCPS gave educators access to the same PD resources through the individualized PD platform in August 2012 and access to participating charter schools is pending.

4) For section (E)(2), Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools:

The District has requested to shift its timeline for staffing the Race to the Top turnaround team at DCPS from its amended timeline of November 2011 to August 2012. DCPS decided to alter its staffing structure slightly for the central office team that is funded through Race to the Top to support turnaround teams

in their planning years. While the changes do not constitute a change in approach, they have further delayed the date by which DCPS will have this team fully-staffed. DCPS was originally supposed to have this team fully staffed by January 2011, but the Department approved an amendment pushing that date to November 2011. The DCPS chancellor and the head of the DCPS Office of School Transformation considered two models for this central office team: matching an experienced principal with each turnaround planning team, or using existing educators to provide support to all turnaround planning teams in specific areas. In spring 2012, DCPS decided to match experienced principals with each turnaround planning team and has been working to fill all positions since then. OSSE reports that the DCPS Race to the Top turnaround support team was fully staffed in July 2012.

The Department acknowledges the timeline delays related to the projects listed above. It is our understanding that these amendments and delays will not result in a change in the District's goals, nor will they substantially change the scope of work. It appears the District will still accomplish all of the activities and deliverables articulated in its approved application within the grant period. However, the Department is concerned by the number of projects in the District's Race to the Top application that are delayed due to procurement issues.

Please note that this letter will be posted on the Department's website as a record of the amendments.

If you need any assistance or have any questions regarding Race to the Top, please do not hesitate to contact the District'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//

Ann Whalen  
Director, Policy and Program Implementation  
Implementation and Support Unit

cc: Hosanna Mahaley, State Superintendent of Education  
Kayleen Irizarry, Assistant Superintendent of Education  
Khalid Randolph, Director of Race to the Top