



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY SECRETARY

December 18, 2013

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 Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE)'s request to amend its approved Race to the Top grant project. Between September 3, 2013 and December 18, 2013, 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 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.

Based on review of the State's amendment request and project-level work plans, I approve the following amendments for sub-criterion (E)(2) Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools with the conditions outlined at the end of this letter.

- Project A: Identify and plan for the turnaround of persistently lowest-achieving (PLA) schools
 - OSSE will reduce the number of schools identified for support from DC Public Schools (DCPS)'s Office of School Turnaround from nine schools to eight.ⁱ Of the original nine PLAs identified in OSSE's approved Race to the Top plan, five have since been closed based on school performance.

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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.

OSSE expressed concern around DCPS' capacity to effectively support nine turnaround schools and thus proposes to add an additional three PLA schools to the original five, for a total of eight schools. This change will not impact OSSE's performance measures for the number of PLA schools initiating one of the four school intervention models, because initiation of a model is not dependent on receiving OSSE or DCPS support from Race to the Top funds.

- Project B: Provide preparation support of potential turnaround teams
 - OSSE will fund DCPS Central Office Support Services for SY 2013-2014 for a total project-level cost of \$352,415. These funds cover personnel and fringe for one project manager and two Experienced Principal Partners.ⁱⁱ
- Project D: Provide differential funding for turnaround schools
 - On top of implementing a school intervention model, OSSE will provide funding, totaling \$2,907,909.68, to eight Race to the Top PLA schools. Four schools will implement a Blended Learning modelⁱⁱⁱ and the other four schools will implement a Twilight Academy model.^{iv} Funds will be distributed across each school in support of activities and budget items in OSSE's work plan. These include software licensure and curricular materials, technology, contracts for technical assistance and support, an instructional specialist position at each school, and stipends to teachers.

Based on significant delays in the implementation in Years 1-3 of OSSE's approved plan, OSSE is refining its strategy for supporting school turnaround in DCPS from providing supplemental, per-student funds that could be included in a school's operating budget to distributing funds dedicated to supporting approved turnaround plans and resources in the neediest PLA schools that demonstrate the most potential for transformation.

As previously discussed with the OSSE team and noted in the August 21, 2013 amendment approval letter, it is the Department's expectation that OSSE would submit an updated amendment request including comprehensive, project-level work plans and budgets for the activities in sub-criterion (E)(2). In conformance with the condition, OSSE has submitted an approvable work plan and budgets for application sub-criterion (E)(2) Projects A, B and D. At this time, OSSE has not, however, submitted a work plan and budget for Project E – Statewide System of Recognition, Accountability, & Support (SRAS).

Conditions

Due to the lack of oversight and spending against sub-criterion (E)(2) activities in OSSE's application, the Department remains concerned about OSSE's oversight of its Race to the Top turnaround work and DCPS' 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) until:

- 1) OSSE submits an approvable work plan and budget for Project E – SRAS; and

- 2) OSSE demonstrates a successful track record of DCPS' expenditures and implementation of activities aligning to the approved plan through, at a minimum, March 1, 2014.

Under a cost reimbursement payment basis, the grantee is required to submit receipts for sub-criterion (E)(2) expenditures to the Department for approval prior to drawing down any grant funds. In addition, OSSE must notify the Department prior to obligating sub-criterion (E)(2) funds and must provide documentation to ensure alignment with its approved plan, as requested. Lastly, the funds associated with Project E, \$1,831,074, will remain in the Year 4 budget for this project until an amendment request is submitted and approved.

It is our understanding that this amendment will not result in a change in the OSSE's goals, nor will they substantially change the scope of work. It is our understanding that the OSSE will accomplish within the grant period all of the activities and deliverables articulated in its approved application.

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 OSSE's Race to the Top Program Officer, Ariel Jacobs, at 202-453-7025 or Ariel.Jacobs@ed.gov.

Sincerely,

//s//

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

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

ⁱ The schools are Brown Education Campus, Garfield Elementary School, Johnson Middle School, Kramer Middle School, Anacostia High School, Dunbar High School, Eastern High School, and Luke C. Moore Academy.

ⁱⁱ In the August 21, 2013 amendment approval letter, the Department approved OSSE's request to reduce the total grant to DCPS for providing support to its PLA schools to \$4,442,225.97. At the time of this approval, OSSE had not yet identified allocations for Year 4 of Project B and Project D. This amendment request specifies those Year 4 allocations.

ⁱⁱⁱ The Blended Learning model is a classroom-based program where a portion of the traditional face-to-face instruction is replaced by web-based online learning.

^{iv} The Twilight Academy model is a small learning community typically held after school hours to address the needs of over-aged and under-credited high school students who are two or more grade levels below.