



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY SECRETARY

July 2, 2012

The Honorable Nathan Deal
Office of the Governor
State of Georgia
203 State Capitol
Atlanta, Georgia 30334

Dear Governor Deal:

I am writing about Georgia's performance on its approved Race to the Top grant project, and in response to Georgia's request to amend its Race to the Top plan. Georgia's Race to the Top Scope of Work was approved on July 20, 2011. This Scope of Work includes specific goals and activities that must be met in order to meet the commitments outlined in Georgia's approved application. After careful review of Georgia's implementation of its teacher and leader evaluation system as outlined in goals 1-4 in Section D of its approved Scope of Work through the June 2012 on-site review, monthly calls, amendment requests, and follow up conversations, as appropriate, the U.S. Department of Education (Department) is placing this portion of Georgia's Race to the Top grant on high-risk status under 34 CFR 80.12. The basis of this determination is detailed below.

The Department is concerned about the overall strategic planning, evaluation, and project management for that system, which includes decisions regarding the quality of the tools and measures used during the educator evaluation pilot and the scalability of the supports the State offered to participating districts. Also, over the past twelve months, Georgia has submitted to the Department two major amendments in addition to the one detailed in this letter, that, when taken as a whole, may constitute significant changes to the educator evaluation system in the State's approved plan. The State has requested these amendments in isolation and prior to finalizing dependent deliverables, such as reviewing and analyzing data from the pilot year. These proposed changes have implications for professional development, tools, resources, guidance, ratings and communication with relevant stakeholders that have not been fully addressed thus far. Finally, given the information provided by the State and LEAs, the Department is, at this time, concerned about the technical, policy, and implementation implications of these revisions to its educator evaluation system.

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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.

Conditions

As a condition of high-risk status, Georgia must submit no later than August 1, 2012 a revised SY 2012-2013 work plan for application sub-criterion (D)(2) (goals 1-4 in Section D of Georgia's Scope of Work). This plan must include clear timelines, activities and deliverables for:

- 1) Management and oversight procedures and routines to oversee project implementation, including ways to identify and address dependencies between multiple projects, timelines, activities, and deliverables;
- 2) A rigorous and transparent process for reviewing components used in its educator evaluation system, including student and peer surveys and the reduction of the student achievement gap.
- 3) Educator engagement and communication systems and activities for SY 2012-2013 for all educators;
- 4) Mechanisms to gather rigorous systematic and ongoing formative feedback from educators participating in the educator evaluation system; and
- 5) Critical decision points where feedback from educators and data will be used to inform potential changes to the educator evaluation before full implementation in SY 2013-2014.

In addition, the State must submit monthly updates in accordance with the work plan described above so the Department can determine if the State is making adequate progress.

Finally, the State must submit a report no later than July 2013 summarizing the analysis and findings related to validation of all components of its educator evaluation system. This report should include information regarding trainings and support provided to pilot districts, communication materials, evaluation activities, and a proposal for any revisions to the educator evaluation system in SY 2013-2014.

The Department will reassess the high-risk designation if the State demonstrates substantial progress implementing the work plan outlined above. The Department will work with Georgia to identify appropriate technical assistance to support this work.

If Georgia does not substantially comply with the conditions outlined above, the Department may take appropriate enforcement action which may include initiating procedures to withhold up to \$33,066,306 associated with projects in sub-criterion (D)(2) of the State's Race to the Top plan. At this time, the State has demonstrated sufficient progress across all other areas of its Race to the Top plan.

Amendment Request

Between April 18, 2012 and June 28, 2012, the State submitted information regarding an amendment request to the Department. 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, and compared it with the Race to the Top Program Principles, which are included in that document.

For the project area of Great Teachers and Leaders, Georgia has proposed to move the survey component of their teacher and leader evaluation systems as a separate measure and instead use it as a piece of evidence in "Qualitative Measures," within its observation protocol based on feedback from participating staff in pilot school districts and the Technical Advisory Committee. In its approved plans, the survey component is worth 10% and the observation protocol composes 40% of a teacher's rating. For principals, the survey component also comprises 10%, but the observation component composes 30% of a principal's rating. In addition, the State has requested to remove the survey component entirely for students in kindergarten through second grade.

The Department approves Georgia's request to remove the requirement for surveys to be administered to students in kindergarten through second grade. However, for all other grades and for the climate survey for principals, the survey component of the evaluation system requires significant revision and validation prior to implementing it in SY 2012-2013. In addition, the State has not provided sufficient evidence to demonstrate how the survey component would be effectively incorporated and used within its proposed approach or the larger implications of this proposal to the evaluation system as a whole. Therefore, the Department approves Georgia's request for all other grades and principals based on compliance with the conditions outlined below:

- 1) Georgia must submit to the Department evidence of an improved or new survey tool that addresses the technical concerns raised by the Georgia Technical Advisory Committee and participating school districts prior to implementing in SY 2012-2013.
- 2) In its August 1, 2012 plan outlined above, Georgia must include specific timelines, activities, and deliverables for executing against the State's proposal to use survey results as evidence in the observation protocol that include:
 - a. Implementation and integration of the survey component in the larger teacher and leader evaluation system during SY 2012-2013;
 - b. Communication and professional development activities with all impacted educators; and
 - c. Mechanisms to ensure the data are used consistently across school districts.

On June 15, 2012, Georgia submitted a report to the Department in response to the conditions included in the Department's January 9, 2012 approval of the removal of the student achievement gap component of its teacher evaluation system for SY 2011-2012. In conformance with the condition, Georgia's report included the steps taken to investigate other methods of calculating the reduction of the student achievement gap at the classroom level, the results of that analysis, and a proposal for the implementation of the component in SY 2012-2013. Based on the report that Georgia submitted, it has minimally fulfilled the specified conditions. As stated in January 9, 2012 letter, the Department has reevaluated Georgia's request and is concerned that this request in combination with the survey request previously discussed may constitute a significant change to the educator evaluation system described in the State's approved application. Therefore, the Department is not making a final determination at this time and will reevaluate this request when the State complies with the conditions outlined above. It is our understanding that this component will remain in the leader evaluation system.

The Department appreciates the dedication and hard work of Georgia's Race to the Top leadership team and recognizes their commitment to implementing the best possible evaluation system for Georgia's educators. The Department will continue to provide assistance to Georgia as you work to meet the commitments included under goals 1-4 in Section D of its approved Scope of Work, and across its Race to the Top grant and will contact you in the next week to discuss additional technical assistance. If you need any assistance or have any questions regarding Race to the Top, please do not hesitate to contact me. As is our practice with all Race to the Top amendments, this letter will be posted on the Department's website.

Sincerely,

//s//

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

Cc: Superintendent John Barge
Teresa MacCartney
Kristin Bernhardt
Erin Hames