



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

JAN 12 2015

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

Dear Governor Deal:

I am writing in response to Georgia's request to the U.S. Department of Education (ED) to review its designation of high-risk status of goals 1-4 in Section D of Georgia's approved Scope of Work, related to its teacher and leader evaluation systems, of its Race to the Top plan. On July 2, 2012, ED placed this portion of Georgia's Race to the Top grant on high-risk status under 34 CFR 80.12. At that time, ED expressed concern 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." To have its high-risk status reassessed, the State must demonstrate substantial progress implementing its revised work plan associated with goals 1-4 in Section D of its approved Scope of Work and work plan.¹

In March 2014, ED conducted an on-site review to analyze Georgia's progress implementing its Race to the Top plan. During this review, ED discussed the State's progress with Georgia Department of Education team members, analyzed evidence submitted by the State to substantiate this progress, and interviewed local educational agency (LEA) and school-level staff about the State's implementation of each of its Race to the Top projects. In August 2014, ED and Georgia jointly identified key milestones and evidence that would demonstrate substantial progress in implementing the State's teacher and leader evaluation system. Between September and November 2014, the State submitted that evidence and held discussions with ED staff to demonstrate progress against its teacher and leader evaluation system. To determine whether removal of high-risk status was appropriate, ED reviewed and compared the evidence against the commitments, deliverables and targets associated with Georgia's implementation of its teacher and leader evaluation systems in goals 1-4 of Section D of the State's Race to the Top Scope of Work and work plan. Based on this evidence, ED has determined that Georgia has made significant progress since being put on high-risk status in July 2012. The progress made during this time period positions Georgia well for continued implementation aligned to its approved plan. Thus, ED has determined that the evidence provided is sufficient to meet the expectation of substantial progress, and is removing high-risk status for those activities and projects related to implementation of the State's teacher and leader evaluation systems associated with goals 1-4 of Section D of Georgia's Race to the Top Scope of Work and work plan. ED recognizes and commends Georgia's efforts to strategically plan and implement its teacher and leader evaluation system with fidelity, provide support to its Race to the

¹ As a condition of high-risk status, Georgia was required to submit a revised work plan for application sub-criterion (D)(2) (goals 1-4 in Section D of its Scope of Work) that includes clear timelines, activities, and deliverables.

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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.

Top participating LEAs as well as other LEAs across the State, and continuously improve implementation of its teacher and leader evaluation system using data and formative feedback from educators and other relevant stakeholders.

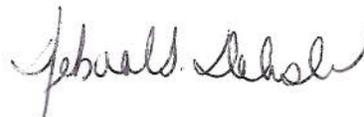
Performance-based Compensation Status Update

On July 30, 2013, ED sent Georgia a letter addressing concerns about the State's application commitments related to its performance-based compensation system. In particular, the State indicated that it no longer planned to implement a performance-based compensation system as described in the State's application. Instead of implementing the performance-based compensation system described in its application, in school year (SY) 2013-2014, Georgia intended to provide one-time bonuses to teachers and leaders for reducing the achievement gap, and in SY 2014-2015, Georgia intends to provide one-time bonuses to teachers and leaders based on the evaluation system.² As a result of Georgia's failure to comply substantially with the requirements of the Race to the Top grant, ED has been withholding those funds associated with performance-based compensation in Project 17: Performance-based pay for teachers (\$3,820,462) and Project 18: Additional bonuses for high-need schools to reduce the achievement gap (\$6,084,167). The State will remain on high-risk status only for those activities related to performance-based compensation under goal 4 of Section D of the State's Race to the Top plan.

In order to gain access to those funds, the State must submit a plan and evidence, including sufficient legal authority, to implement the performance-based compensation system outlined in its approved Race to the Top application and plan. ED continues to work with Georgia to fulfill this condition.

If you need any assistance or have any questions regarding Race to the Top, please do not hesitate to contact Melissa Siry at (202) 260-0926 or melissa.siry@ed.gov. Thank you for your continued commitment to enhancing education for all of Georgia's students.

Sincerely,



Deborah S. Delisle
Assistant Secretary

cc: John D. Barge, State Superintendent of Schools
Dr. Susan Andrews, Deputy Superintendent for Race to the Top Implementation

² A complete description of Georgia's plans under selection criterion (D)(2) can be found on pages 101-126 of its application. Its plans regarding its performance-based compensation system can be found on pages 110-114. Georgia made additional references to its performance-based compensation system on pages 43-44, 116, 129, and 133-134, and 533-535 of its application appendix. These excerpts from its application are included as Attachment 2. Georgia's commitments related to performance-based compensation can be found in its Scope of Work on pages 72-74, 81, and 88.