



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY SECRETARY

August 23, 2011

The Honorable Lincoln Chafee
Office of the Governor
State House
Providence, Rhode Island 02903-1196

Dear Governor Chafee:

I am writing in response to Rhode Island's request to amend its approved Race to the Top grant project. Between June 10, 2011 and July 5, 2011, the State submitted documentation to the U.S. Department of Education to support two amendments to its approved Race to the Top plan and budget. The State provided additional clarification as requested during the month of July. 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 January 6, 2011, the Department sent a letter and "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 am pleased to approve amendments related to high-performing charter schools grants and the educator certification system, as described below.

- For the High-Performing Charter Schools project, award grants to recruit high-performing charter schools and promote expansion of existing high-performing charter schools in years 2-4 instead of years 1-2. In year 1, Rhode Island has worked to recruit out-of-state and in-state providers, but proposes to conduct the competitive application process and award grants starting in year 2. Charter management organizations (CMOs) have indicated that the original timeframe did not provide the CMOs sufficient time to create their plans and submit grant applications. In addition, award four grants of \$250,000 each instead of two grants of \$500,000 each. This adjustment in approach reflects a revised cost estimate and the State's belief that offering a greater number of grants will ultimately raise student achievement in the State by allowing for a larger number of seats in high-performing charter schools.

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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.

Note that in cases where the awardees are not LEAs, the funds will be awarded via contracts, in accordance with the Education Department General Administrative Regulations and Rhode Island's procurement laws.

The Department approves this request with the requirement that the State submits to the Department by September 9, 2011 an assurance that: (a) the State will make at least one charter school grant for either recruitment of a high-performing charter school or expansion of an existing high-performing charter school by school year 2012-13, and (b) that at least one new high-performing charter school will open no later than school year 2013-14. As discussed with the State by phone, for the purposes of this grant, expansion of an existing high-performing charter school will be defined as opening a new campus or serving a significant number of new students. This means that, for example, expanding to new grades without adding new students would not be considered expansion.

- For the Evaluation System Design and Certification Data System Redesign project, shift the adoption of the new Regents Regulations for educator certification from the fourth quarter of year one to January 2012, in year 2. The time shift proposed is due to the appointment of new members to the Board of Regents and the significant time needed for public hearings and to revise the draft regulations based on public comment. A portion of the funds for related certification data systems work (\$165,360) move from year 1 to year 2. Additionally, the State will refine its approach by using the funds to support the hiring of temporary programmers to assist the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (RIDE) technology staff in certification data system work, rather than issuing an RFP for an outside vendor. An updated assessment of the capacity of RIDE's Office of Network and Information Services (ONIS) showed that ONIS will be able to complete the work with the assistance of temporary programmers who will work under ONIS' direction. This approach is expected to help Rhode Island build internal capacity and sustain the work after the end of the Race to the Top grant.

The Department approves this request. If Rhode Island does not substantially comply with the revised timeframe for the educator certification system approved under this amendment, the Department will take appropriate enforcement action, which will include initiating withholding proceedings that may include up to the \$18,026,492 in funds budgeted for the State's Educator Effectiveness section of its Race to the Top grant, as well as associated funds subgranted to participating LEAs related to Educator Effectiveness.

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 Rhode Island 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, Bridget Kelly, at 202-453-5534 or bridget.kelly@ed.gov.

Sincerely,

//s//

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

cc: Commissioner Deborah Gist
Mary-Beth Fafard
Carolyn Dias