



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY SECRETARY

September 20, 2011

The Honorable Bill Haslam
Office of the Governor
State Capitol
Nashville, Tennessee 37243-0001

Dear Governor Haslam:

I am writing in response to Tennessee's request to amend its approved Race to the Top grant project. Between August 11 and August 23, 2011, the State submitted amendment requests and supporting documentation 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 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 the following amendments:

- In the "Competitive Supplemental Fund" project, broaden the potential uses of funds. Tennessee's application included an opportunity for local educational agencies (LEAs) with grant awards within the bottom 20 percent of the total share of the LEA portion of funds to apply for additional funds. Districts could apply to use these funds to support its scope of work in compensation reform and turning around low performing schools. In year one of the grant, only seven of 28 eligible districts applied. The State believes low participation was due to an unintentionally narrow definition of the scope of potential activities to strengthen teachers and leaders.
 - In year two of the grant, the State will continue to allow LEAs with grant awards within the bottom 20 percent of the total share of the LEA portion of funds to apply for these additional funds to propose activities related to turning around low performing schools and compensation reform. Additionally, the State will allow eligible districts to submit plans for other components of its great teachers and leaders plan, such as professional development targeted to information from the new evaluation system.
 - Tennessee initially budgeted \$375,000 for this fund in each year of the grant. While all seven LEAs that applied for these additional funds in year one received awards, \$15,000 of the year one budget was not used. Tennessee will roll over \$15,000 and make \$390,000 available for year two awards.

Tennessee believes widening options for LEAs to support the development of teachers and leaders will encourage more eligible LEAs to apply with high quality, innovative proposals.

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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.

- In the “Integrating Data to Improve Instruction” project, merge another closely related project into a single budget and shift unused funds into another high-need project.
 - Tennessee’s application included two projects to promote the understanding and use of student data for a variety of audiences: “Data Dashboard” and “Integrating Data to Improve Instruction.” The State believes that combining the budgets of the two projects will streamline the funding process. All activities and outcomes related to these projects as outlined in its original application remain unchanged.
 - Additionally, the initial approved budget for “Integrating Data to Improve Instruction” included personnel salaries and benefits for two professional development managers. The State has since determined these roles are sufficiently supported by existing State staff and leadership.
 - The State will reallocate a portion of the funds allocated for these two positions to support a different, high-need project. The State believes that shifting funds to support an Evaluation Director to oversee the “Teacher and Principal Evaluation Development” project is necessary to ensure adequate internal capacity to coordinate that project as it moves forward.ⁱ
- In the “School Leader Supply and Demand Study” project, widen the scope of activities to integrate the “Principal Preparation Program Report Card” into a single project and budget. Tennessee believes the work of both projects is complimentary and reorganizing this work will allow the State to create a comprehensive report to provide necessary data to the public on outcomes of preparation program and provide support to continuously improve programs.

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 amendment.

I am confident that Tennessee 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 Tennessee’s Race to the Top Program Officer, Jessie Levin, at 202-453-6651 or Jessie.Levin@ed.gov.

Sincerely,

//s//

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

cc: Commissioner Kevin Huffman
Erin O’Hara

ⁱ The State will submit an additional amendment to the Department to describe the proposed use of the remaining \$292,785 funds in this budget .This total is the sum of \$193,785 budgeted but not needed in personnel and fringe costs and a \$99,000 difference between the estimated contract amounts in the initial “Integrating Data to Improve Instruction” and “Data Dashboard” budgets and the executed contracts.