



State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Shepard Building
255 Westminster Street
Providence, Rhode Island 02903-3400

Deborah A. Gist
Commissioner

June 29, 2011

Thelma Meléndez
Assistant Secretary of Elementary and Secondary Education
Room 3W315
U.S. Department of Education Building
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Assistant Secretary Meléndez:

I am writing to request the appropriate waivers that will allow the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (RIDE) to carry over 100 percent of the Title I 1003(g) School Improvement Grant (SIG) funds that it intended to award to five schools in our 2010 competition. Our objective is to roll over the FY 2010 funds so that they can be combined with our FY 2011 funds in our 2011 SIG competition. In order to do this, we would refresh our list of Persistently Lowest Achieving schools (PLAs) for the 2011 competition using the most current data available.

RIDE understands that, if this request is granted, the United States Department of Education (ED) would condition our FY 2010 SIG grant award, prohibiting RIDE from making grant awards with FY 2010 funds. This condition would remain in effect until RIDE has an approvable FY 2010 application that contains our refreshed list, as well as any other necessary changes. Only once our FY 2010 grant application is approved would RIDE run the SIG competition using combined FY 2010 and 2011 funds. Our plan is to initiate this competition early in the 2011-2012 school year.

In the fall of 2010, the Providence Public School District (PPSD) recommended to Commissioner Gist that the four PLA schools identified in Providence could be turned around through implementation of the Restart model. The challenges – both seen and unforeseen - with establishing a labor-management compact between PPSD and the Providence Teachers Union (PTU) proved to be daunting. The process and subsequent attempts to refine and correct the establishment of the Education Management Organization (EMO) through which the compact in Providence would be enacted took a substantial portion of the year. Ultimately, Providence abandoned that plan and the district engaged in an expedited process to request, and then implement, the Transformation model in its schools. We now know that the Restart and Turnaround models take considerable time to ensure that external operators are identified, vetted, and processed through state procurement requirements, and that re-staffing efforts are completed in accordance with applicable state law.

Our "refreshed" list of schools to be identified using 2010 state assessment data, NCLB classifications, and current graduation rates will identify several schools in Providence as persistently lowest-achieving. Based on the number of schools to be identified, coupled with the fact that the four PLA schools currently served in Providence are all using the Transformation model, it is clear that Providence will need to implement a Restart or Turnaround model in at least one of their PLA schools. RIDE believes that it is in the best interests of the students enrolled in the affected schools that there be adequate time to complete the steps of the application, pre-planning and implementation process. Current fiscal and personnel pressures in Providence only reinforce our conviction that this approach will result in better outcomes for students. I make this request convinced that it is in the best interests of all students attending our lowest performing schools in Providence.

Telephone (401)222-4600 Fax (401)222-6178 TTY (800)745-5555 Voice (800)745-6575 Website: www.ride.ri.gov

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Page 2
June 29, 2011
Assistant Secretary Meléndez

With respect to the requested waiver, RIDE assures that it will provide all relevant stakeholders appropriate notice and reasonable opportunity to comment on this waiver request. Thank you for your consideration of this waiver request. Please contact me at (401) 222- 8703 if you have any questions regarding this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David V. Abbott", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

David V. Abbott
Deputy Commissioner/General Counsel