



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

The Honorable Bruce Rauner
Governor
Office of the Governor
207 State House
Springfield, IL 62706

NOV 15 2015

Dear Governor Rauner:

I am writing in response to Illinois' request to amend its approved Race to the Top grant project, including revisions to the project period to implement a portion of its plan. Between July 15, 2015, and October 26, 2015, the State submitted documentation to, and held conversations with the U.S. Department of Education (ED) to support amendment requests to its approved Race to the Top plan. ED has the authority to approve amendments to your plan and budget, provided the revisions do not change the overall scope and objectives of the approved proposal. In June 2014, ED issued *Amendment Requests with No-cost Extension Guidance and Principles*, indicating the process by which amendments containing request to provide additional time for a grantee to accomplish the reform goals and deliverables it committed to in its Race to the Top application and approved Scope of Work would be reviewed. To determine whether approval could be granted, ED 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 approve the following amendments, including timeline extensions, as described below.

- In the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) Capacity project under sub-criterion (A)(2), shift \$274,745.90 to Year 5 and extend the State's project period to December 31, 2016. The funds will continue to support State personnel to provide grant oversight, communications, reporting, and support to participating Race to the Top local educational agencies (LEAs) during Year 5¹.
- In the LEA Support and Regional Capacity project under sub-criterion (A)(2), shift \$119,100 to Year 5 and extend the State's project period to September 30, 2016. ISBE will utilize funds to extend the contract for seven coaches to continue to provide supports, technical assistance, and monitoring of participating LEAs in Year 5. The State will also hold two regional networking events for participating LEAs in winter and spring 2016 with a focus on sustaining Race to the Top initiatives and grant closeout.

¹ As part of ISBE's budget process, the State reviews its actual expenditures in comparison to its original budget and identifies any funds that are unexpended across all projects. ISBE reallocates the unexpended funds to other projects according to needs, some of which are described throughout this amendment letter.

- In the Establish the Illinois Collaborative for Education Policy Research (ICEPR) project under the (C)(3) sub-criterion, extend the State’s project period to December 31, 2016. ISBE originally planned to contract with a lead research entity by December 2014 to perform the responsibilities of the ICEPR project throughout Year 4. However, as a result of significant procurement challenges which impacted ISBE’s ability to secure a lead research entity, the State will now complete this project in Year 5. Specifically, ISBE will secure a contract with a lead research entity and establish a research agenda with a focus on how policies and programs promote student growth and close achievement gaps. The lead research entity will also be responsible for conducting ad-hoc research requests for the State, working with LEAs to building local capacity to support research, and the dissemination of data and research findings in a manner consistent with State and federal privacy and protection laws. No Race to the Top funds will be needed to complete this project.
- In response to a condition placed on the Illinois’ scope of work approval, the State committed to conducting a validation study to demonstrate that student growth as measured by the assessments selected by participating LEAs is correlated to student growth as measured by the State assessments and outline what actions the State will take in response to the results.² The State submitted to ED an interim report in fall 2014 and a final report was to be submitted by December 2015. The State requests to extend the date for submission of the report until March 31, 2016 due to delays in receiving data from the statewide assessments administered during the 2014-2015 school year. No additional Race to the Top funds will be needed to complete this report.
- In the Performance Evaluation Advisory Council (PEAC) Supports for Accelerated Performance Evaluation Reform Act of 2010 (PERA) Implementation project under the (D)(2) sub-criterion, shift \$54,066 to Year 5 and extend the project timeline to June 30, 2016 for two activities. First, Race to the Top funds has supported a survey of learning conditions at the district level. The initial year was school year (SY) 2012-2013 and the State would like to administer the survey during SY 2015-2016. The State and LEAs point to the value in having data to support improving the learning climate and LEAs point to the survey as a tool to increase parent involvement. Second, based on feedback from the field, the State will convene participating Race to the Top LEAs with non-participating LEAs to provide training and share lessons learned on the implementation of teacher and principal evaluation and support systems. In addition, the State will continue to fund PEAC to continue to identify needs in the field related to PERA implementation and develop corresponding guidance and resources.
- In the Teacher and Principal Induction and Mentoring project under the (D)(5) sub-criterion, shift \$161,279 to Year 5 and extend the project timeline to December 31, 2016. These funds will continue induction and mentoring supports provided to participating LEAs and sharing of best practices across the State. Further, ISBE plans to utilize funds identified from outside of the grant to fund competitive grants to LEAs to continue induction and mentoring programs established at the local level and promote sustainability beyond Race to the Top.

² For additional information, see ED’s August 6, 2012 scope of work approval letter here: <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/sow-letters/illinois.pdf>.

Illinois also submitted a request to revise the project period for LEAs to implement their Scopes of Work. In June 2014, ED issued “Amendment Requests with No Cost Extension Guidance and Principles” indicating the process by which amendments containing requests to provide additional time for a grantee to accomplish the reform goals and deliverables it committed to in its Race to the Top application and approved Scope of Work would be reviewed and approved or denied. In order to consider amendment requests with no-cost extensions, ED indicated that States must address the timelines and implications of the amendment on the 50 percent LEA subgrants (i.e., allocations to participating LEAs), as well as the process the State will use to review LEA subgrant requests to obligate and liquidate funds after the current project period. To determine whether approval could be granted, ED has applied the conditions and elements specific to no-cost extensions noted in the document, and compared it with the Race to the Top program *Principles* included in the “Grant Amendment Submission Process” document issues to Governors of grantee States.

Through conversations with Illinois and documentation submitted as part of this amendment request, we understand that the State will begin to review requests from participating LEAs to extend the project period to complete Race to the Top activities on a case-by-case basis. ED generally approves the State’s process as described in Appendix 1. Prior to December 31, 2015, ED expects the State to submit a record of each participating LEA project approved by the State for a no-cost extension and the total funding approved for the LEAs’ Year 5 Scopes of Work.

ED understands that this amendment will not result in a change in your State’s performance measures and outcomes, nor will they substantially change the scope and objectives of the work. Please note that by law all Race to the Top funds revert to the U.S. Department of Treasury as of October 1, 2017. ED expects grantees with no-cost extensions to liquidate all funds by April 3, 2017. This letter will be posted on ED’s website as a record of the amendments.

If you need any assistance or have any questions regarding Race to the Top, please contact Karen Dorsey Hargrove at (202) 453-6695 or OSS.Illinois@ed.gov. Thank you for your continued commitment to enhancing education for all of the Illinois’ students.

Sincerely,



Monique M. Chism, Ph.D.
Director
Office of State Support

cc: Dr. Tony Smith, State Superintendent
Julie Evans, Race to the Top Director

Attachment: ISBE LEA Process