

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Dr. Eric J. Smith
Commissioner of Education

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

T. WILLARD FAIR, *Chairman*

Members

PETER BOULWARE

DR. AKSHAY DESAI

ROBERTO MARTÍNEZ

JOHN R. PADGET

KATHLEEN SHANAHAN

LINDA K. TAYLOR



January 11, 2010

Mr. Alberto M. Carvalho, Superintendent
Miami-Dade County Public Schools
1450 NE 2nd Avenue
Miami, Florida 33132

Dear Superintendent Carvalho:

Thank you for your letter expressing concerns about Race to the Top. We have addressed them below underneath your original language.

- Defining sustainable in the new "normal" requires further discussion. Entering the 2010-11 Legislative Session, Florida faces a \$2.5 billion shortfall, \$800 million to \$1 billion impacting education, and in 2011-12 the state's stabilization funds are gone, impacting education by another \$1 billion. Making several significant changes (e.g., lesson study, expansion of workforce programs, effectiveness pay, "reduction-in-force" tied to performance) non-negotiable over a four-year period will require new recurring funds beyond realignment of existing funds. The recent announcement of a mid-year funding proration of over \$7.5 million for Miami-Dade County Public Schools only underscores this concern;

Funds will be included in the state's budget to contract with financial consultants. Their purpose will be to support districts to identify funds that can be redirected in existing budgets to address sustainability of reforms put into place during the four-year Race to the Top (RTTT) period.

- All funds dedicated to supporting elements of the grant cannot draw from other federal entitlement funds such as Title I and Title II as these programs are already effectively aligned to student improvement;

The requirements for the lowest 5% of our schools are the same as DA requirements. Funds in Title I should already be aligned to the DA requirements. If they are not Title I, LEA plans are updated each year and with twice the amount of Title I, School Improvement and IDEA funds coming into the district, any requirements of RTTT can more easily be addressed. The specific use of Title I and Title II funds are at the discretion of districts under the federal requirements for the use of the funds. Our intent is that you align these funds to support, augment and strengthen initiatives for schools within the lowest 5% and their feeder patterns with a particular focus placed on expanding Pre-K, career academies and programs that target the needs of at-risk students to ensure the development of college or career ready skills, especially those returning

from DJJ facilities. Additionally, since Title II-A funds are primarily used for teacher and principal recruitment, retention and professional development, the district should make the same considerations of coordinating the use of these funds with RTTT and any other state or federal programs to maximize the benefit to the district, staff and students.

- Flexibility must be provided that will defer the progression of sanctions for those schools that demonstrate improvement. Research indicates a school needs three to five years to show improvement as a result of reform efforts. Based on this evidence it is recommended that schools that are an F be required to reach a grade of C within a prescribed time period using a growth model approach. This model will require the schools to show improvement in the total school grade points each year to reach the final target of C. These improvements will also include an increase in the total percent criteria met on the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). This continuous improvement in both indicators (NCLB AYP and the school grade) would demonstrate that the school will eventually meet conventional standards of success;

The creation of annual goals for schools in the lowest 5% will rest with districts as a condition of receiving RTTT and School Improvement Grant funds. These goals must be consistent with the expectations of Differentiated Accountability (DA). That is, a school must work hard to make its turnaround option work, while at the same time it must plan for another option if the school cannot demonstrate that the selected option is bearing fruit.

- Maintaining local control of the state's varied systems of education would dictate that the local education agency (LEA) should be empowered to develop the calculation for the effectiveness levels for teachers and should determine performance measures, with the state to provide review and approval as currently specified in F.S. 1012.34;

The state's plan is to have a common method to measure student growth for courses associated with the state assessment system (FCAT). Other assessments of student growth along with the methods to calculate growth will be determined by local school districts. The state will provide a list of assessments from which the district may choose to select models for calculating growth and training on those models for districts that choose to use them. The state will also revise the set of core practices that the district should include in its evaluation system, as currently provided in s.1012.34, F.S., and provide national expertise to districts to support improving their evaluation content and processes. This process and the selection of the state method of calculating student growth for courses associated with FCAT will be transparent, will include participating districts in the decision-making process and will result in state board rule revisions under current rule making authority (see 6A-5.065 and 6B-4.010, F.A.C.).

- The state requirements regarding school transformation must be more flexible particularly in the number of schools which may exercise the options provided by the state;

The particular requirements regarding the transformation turnaround option are set by the federal government as a condition to receive SIG funds. The state's application and the requirements to be fulfilled by districts regarding the turnaround options will be consistent with federal and state requirements.

- Schools designed to serve our most fragile populations, such as alternative schools and special education centers, should be graded, but exempt from the sanctions associated with Florida's Differentiated Accountability (DA) requirements;

All schools, including ESE centers and alternative schools, are eligible to be placed within Differentiated Accountability (DA) as determined by state statute. However, ungraded schools cannot be classified in the Intervene category for DA. Since ESE centers do not receive grades, they cannot be placed in the Intervene category. This is also the case for ungraded alternative schools.

- A phased-in implementation beginning with our highest needs schools and their feeder patterns will ensure there is sufficient funding to accomplish all requisite requirements of the program; A phased-in process is the LEA's choice.
- In order to ensure a direct link between student performance for the broadest group of teachers and principals, LEAs must be provided flexibility to use other rigorous, nationally recognized student performance standards to measure student growth;

Such measures would be reviewed in the LEA grant application and, if appropriate, approved. The state's plan is to have a common method to measure student growth for courses associated with the state assessment system (FCAT). Other assessments of student growth along with the methods to calculate growth will be determined by local school districts. The state will provide a list of assessments from which the district can choose to select models for calculating growth and training on those models for districts that choose to use them. The grant requires assessments used to measure student growth to be rigorous and comparable across classrooms. The state requires that they be aligned to the state-adopted student standards. It is also anticipated that these systems will be implemented over the course of the grant, not all in year one.

- While the compensation process will require substantial collective bargaining, as an initial position, LEAs should maintain the flexibility within their compensation schedules to recognize years of service, while incorporating differentiated salaries predicated upon student achievement and a satisfactory performance evaluation. Additionally, the state should not preclude any district from utilizing seniority as a component of the decision-making process for purposes of reductions in staff which may be required as a result of shifting student populations or budgetary limitations. As an example, in cases where there is a reduction in staff, appropriate data may not be available to meet the statutory reappointment guidelines. When dealing with employees' livelihoods, this process will need to ultimately stand the assured legal challenge; and

Nothing in the grant proposal prohibits school districts from including a recognition of years of service, levels of training or other considerations in their compensation plans, only that effectiveness results in the most significant gains. The district has flexibility to implement changes to compensation plans over the grant period.

Superintendent Carvalho
January 11, 2010
Page Four

- The changing of school schedules of all DA secondary schools for a minimum of one hour of lesson study by subject area does not allow for other effective groupings, such as grade level and cross disciplinary. Depending on the district, there will likely be significant costs associated with secondary schools schedule changes that fully support this activity.

Focus on creating common planning in the core subject areas (reading, language arts, mathematics, and science) in your lowest 5% of schools first. This has been done in Intervene high schools in Duval and DA schools at the elementary, middle and high school level throughout Orange County that contend with the same demands on master scheduling as your DA schools. Your RED would be more than willing to share examples of these master schedules.

Please let us know if we can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Eric J. Smith". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Eric J. Smith
Commissioner