



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY

AUG 12 2011

Dear Chief State School Officer:

I am writing to address an issue regarding the full and effective implementation of the transformation model in your State's persistently lowest-achieving schools under the School Improvement Grants (SIG) program. Several States have reported, and U.S. Department of Education (Department) monitoring visits have confirmed, that it has been difficult for many transformation schools to implement high-quality teacher and principal evaluation systems as quickly as required in the SIG final requirements and that there is a need for extra time for implementation in some situations.

As you know, one of the most critical components of the transformation model is rigorous, transparent, and equitable evaluation systems for teachers and principals. These systems must take into account data on student academic growth as a significant factor, as well as other factors, such as multiple observation-based assessments of performance, ongoing collections of information on professional practice reflective of student achievement, and increased high school graduation rates. Under the SIG final requirements, districts must develop these evaluation systems during the first year of implementing the transformation model.

I cannot emphasize enough the key role of high-quality teacher and principal evaluation systems in supporting improved teaching and learning in all schools, and particularly in persistently lowest-achieving schools. At the same time, I recognize that many districts are approaching this work for the first time. Without previous groundwork and investment, developing high-quality, comprehensive evaluation systems may take more time than initially contemplated under the SIG final requirements. For this reason, an extended timeline for developing and implementing such systems may be appropriate for some schools in the first two SIG cohorts (those that began full implementation of the transformation model in the 2010–2011 school year and those that will begin full implementation in the 2011–2012 school year).

For these reasons, I am inviting States to apply for a waiver to permit them to allow, in accordance with criteria they develop, a local educational agency (LEA) that is implementing a transformation model with SIG funds to take additional time to meet the requirement in Section I.A.2(d)(1)(i)(B) of the SIG final requirements. The waiver would apply only to evaluation systems for cohort 1 and cohort 2 schools as follows:

- ❖ A school that began implementing the transformation model during the 2010–2011 school year (cohort 1) and that was not able to complete the development and implementation of its evaluation systems during that year must develop them during the 2011–2012 school year and, at a minimum, pilot them for all teachers and principals no later than the 2012–2013 school year. The piloted systems should be capable of being

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used for decisions regarding, for example, retention, promotion, compensation, and rewards, no later than the 2013–2014 school year.

- ❖ A school that begins implementing the transformation model in the 2011–2012 school year (cohort 2) must develop its evaluation systems during that year, pilot them for all teachers and principals during the 2012–2013 school year, and use the system in the school, including for decisions regarding, for example, retention, promotion, compensation, and rewards, no later than the 2013–2014 school year.

To receive this waiver, a State must submit a request to the Department that addresses the requirements in section 9401 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), as amended. We are enclosing a template to assist States in submitting their request. The template includes the assurances that each State requesting the waiver must provide. For example, to receive the waiver, the State must assure that it will develop criteria to evaluate whether an LEA has demonstrated a sufficient level of commitment to, and progress in, implementing principal and teacher evaluation systems for its cohort 1 or cohort 2 schools to justify the receipt of a timeline waiver and to evaluate whether, if an extension is granted, the LEA's affected schools will be able to meet the timelines described above for developing and implementing the evaluation systems. To assist States in developing their criteria, we are enclosing suggested guiding questions that can help differentiate among LEAs that have met the requirement, those that are making sufficient progress, and those that have not made a good-faith effort and, therefore, do not merit additional time to meet the teacher and principal evaluation system requirements of the SIG transformation model.

Within 30 days of receiving the waiver from the Department, the State must post its process, criteria, and timeline for approval of LEA requests to implement the waiver on its public Web site. The State must also (a) develop a technical assistance and support plan that outlines how the State will differentiate support to its LEAs based on their current level of implementation and (b) provide LEAs with the assistance they need in meeting the evaluation system requirements. Similarly, the State must develop a plan for the 2011–2012 school year, or update its existing plan, to monitor those LEAs that are approved to implement the waiver in order to ensure that they are on track to full implementation of teacher and principal evaluation systems as outlined above. In addition, within 30 days of approving an LEA's extension request, the State must post on its Web site and submit to the Department a list that includes (1) the LEAs (including their NCES district identification number) that it has approved to implement the waiver, (2) the schools (including their NCES school identification number) within those LEAs that are implementing the transformation model, and (3) an identification of the cohort within which each school falls.

To assist States in helping LEAs develop and implement strong teacher and principal evaluation systems, the Department plans to provide technical assistance over the next few months. The Department recently launched the School Turnaround Learning Community (STLC), which will be a platform for resource-sharing and ongoing support for States, LEAs, and schools (www.schoolturnaroundsupport.org). On July 29, the Department launched a four-part webinar series, via the STLC, on teacher evaluation system implementation. The next webinar, which is

targeted to both SEAs and LEAs, will be held on August 12 and will focus on *Selecting Evaluation Measures*. In addition, the Department's National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality has just released *A Practical Guide to Designing Comprehensive Teacher Evaluation Systems* (<http://www.tqsource.org/practicalGuide/>) and the Reform Support Network recently released *Great Teachers and Leaders: State Considerations on Building Systems of Educator Effectiveness* (<http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/great-teachers.doc>). The Department will continue to provide support on this topic via the STLC and through its comprehensive centers. Let us know if there are additional ways the Department can be helpful on this and other topics of interest.

For additional information about the general requirements for waiver requests under section 9401 of the ESEA, please consult Section A of the Department's Non-Regulatory Guidance on Title I, Part A Waivers (July 2009) (available at: <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/leg/recovery/programs.html>).

I encourage you to submit your waiver request by August 26, 2011, in order for the Department to respond in time for your affected LEAs to develop their systems with a clear understanding of what is required of them during the 2011–2012 school year. If you have any questions or need additional information as you prepare your waiver request, please contact Carlas McCauley at carlas.mccauley@ed.gov or (202) 260-0824.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Yudin', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Michael Yudin
Acting Assistant Secretary

Enclosures