



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY SECRETARY

July 29, 2013

The Honorable Neil Abercrombie
Office of the Governor
State Capitol, Executive Chambers
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Dear Governor Abercrombie:

I am writing in response to Hawaii's request to review its high-risk status on its Race to the Top grant. On December 21, 2011, the U.S. Department of Education (Department) placed Hawaii's Race to the Top grant on high-risk status under 34 CFR 80.12 and, as a condition of high-risk status, placed the grant on a cost reimbursement basis. At that time, the State had not demonstrated adequate progress implementing its approved plans in the first year of the grant. To remove high-risk status the State "must provide clear and compelling evidence of substantial progress across its Race to the Top plan."

After a March 2012 on-site review, the Department determined that the State had taken steps in the right direction and removed it from cost reimbursement status, but kept the State on high-risk status because of, as stated in the Department's May 4, 2012 letter, the "...preliminary nature of most of [the] activities and the lack of necessary sustaining conditions for reform..." In February 2013, the Department removed Hawaii's high-risk status for assurance area B (Standards and Assessments) and assurance area C (Data Systems) based on the clear and compelling evidence of substantial progress provided by the State in January 2013 and in subsequent discussions. The State remained on high-risk status for assurance areas A (State Success Factors), D (Great Teachers and Leaders), and E (Turning Around the Lowest Performing Schools), and competitive preference priority STEM (Emphasis on Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics).

In April 2013, the Department conducted a week-long Year 3 onsite program review to analyze Hawaii's progress implementing its Race to the Top plan. During this review, the Department discussed progress with Hawaii Department of Education (HIDOE) team members, analyzed evidence submitted by the State to substantiate this progress, and interviewed Complex Area and school-level staff about the State's implementation of each of its Race to the Top projects. The State submitted additional evidence throughout spring 2013, further demonstrating its progress in projects across its Race to the Top grant.

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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.

To determine whether removal of status could be granted, the Department reviewed and compared the evidence against the commitments, deliverables and targets in the State's Race to the Top Scope of Work and plan in these assurance areas. Based on this evidence, the Department determined that Hawaii had made significant progress since being put on high-risk status in December 2011. Due to HIDOE's ratified contract with the Hawaii State Teachers Association, the agreement with the Hawaii Government Employees Association, and recent Board regulations, the Department is no longer concerned about the State's authority to fully implement initiatives in its approved Race to the Top plans. HIDOE is executing projects consistent with the amended timelines and has demonstrated that it was able to meet critical milestones in the last six months in a way they were unable to prior to December 2011. The progress made during this time period situates them well for continued implementation aligned to their approved plan. Thus, the Department has determined that the evidence provided is sufficient to meet the expectation of clear and compelling evidence of substantial progress, and will remove high-risk status for Hawaii's Race to the Top grant in all remaining categories (assurance area A, D, E, and competitive preference priority STEM), effective with this letter.

The Department recognizes and commends Hawaii's efforts to accelerate the progress of its Race to the Top plan. We will continue to provide assistance to Hawaii as it works to meet the commitments in its grant. If you need any assistance or have any questions regarding Race to the Top, please do not hesitate to contact Hawaii's Race to the Top Program Officer, Rebecca Zazove at 202-260-1425 or rebecca.zazove@ed.gov.

Sincerely,



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

cc: Kathryn Matayoshi, State Superintendent
Kendra Oishi, Governor's Policy Director
Stephen Schatz, Assistant Superintendent for Strategic Reform
Otis Wilson, U.S. Department of Education, Risk Management Services
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