



Dr. John D. Barge, State School Superintendent

July 6, 2012

Ann Whalen, Director
Policy and Program Implementation
Implementation and Support Unit
United States Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Ann,

You will find attached to this email our response to the letter announcing the high-risk status that Georgia was placed on earlier this week. While we are disappointed that we were not given sufficient time to respond to the change in status, we are as committed as ever to continue building out the Race to the Top grant with integrity and discipline.

I want to give you an overview of where I believe we are in Georgia. As you know, the grant application was written by a different administration and was Georgia's best estimate of how we needed to proceed in order to achieve the goals outlined in the grant application. We built in timelines and pilot programs with the intention of designing a teacher evaluation system that would meet the needs of our students by better informing teachers and leaders as to their strengths and weaknesses in the classroom and in administration surrounding the classroom.

We have asked for a number of amendments to the grant because with the actual roll out of the programs we found in our pilots that there were issues that the original grant authors were unable to foresee in the grant-writing process. Additionally, our legal counsel has advised that, without changes, we will subject the state to a potentially highly litigious situation. I will not waste taxpayer dollars to defend a system that we have been warned will not work. The goals we seek are very ambitious and will mean great changes in how we educate our students and evaluate the process for delivering that education.

We cannot, with integrity, continue building the program without making the changes that our pilots and our principal stakeholders have told us need to be made. We realize that the changes are, in some instances, sweeping. I must, however, as the State School Superintendent, elected by and accountable to the people of Georgia, do what is in the proven best interest for our children. To do anything less would be tantamount to failing the duties of my office.

With that in mind, we are prepared to work with your department to resolve the issues that have led to this designation. We will do everything in our power to meet your deadlines, but we cannot compromise on issues that we believe will not improve education in Georgia.

We will not let perfect become the enemy of very good—even while we are working to achieve our version of perfect for Georgia's public schools.

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John D. Barge".

Dr. John D. Barge
Georgia's State School Superintendent

"Making Education Work for All Georgians"



STATE OF GEORGIA
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
ATLANTA 30334-0900

Nathan Deal
GOVERNOR

July 3, 2012

Ann Whalen, Director
Policy and Program Implementation
Implementation and Support Unit
United States Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Ann:

The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) and the Governor's Office are writing in response to the U.S. Department of Education's (US ED) letter of July 2, 2012, concerning Georgia's performance on its approved Race to the Top grant project, placing Section D, Goals 1-4, of Georgia's approved Scope of Work on high risk status.

In emphasizing the conditions of high-risk status US ED placed on the project management and implementation of the work in D(2), US ED failed to acknowledge Georgia's successes in several areas of the evaluation systems, including one area in which US ED's own experts have stated Georgia is leading the work in the nation. Such widely divergent reviews of the work are disconcerting at a minimum.

While Georgia proposed amendments to the utilization of the data from perception surveys and the calculation of the student achievement gap at the classroom level, we agree with US ED on the importance of both data sources and have worked diligently, with technical assistance from multiple national experts, to determine and propose workable solutions for effective implementation with positive outcomes for Georgia students. The technical, policy, and implementation implications of these proposed revisions to Georgia's educator evaluation systems are, in our view, positive.

The decisions that have been made concerning the components and configuration of the teacher and leader evaluation systems have been made based on the best information currently available from the 2012 pilot, and have been made in the best interests of students, teachers, and leaders. The tension between the timeline for extended evaluation of the pilot data and the timeline for developing training materials for the 2012-2013 year required that we make decisions quickly. However, Georgia is confident that the teacher and leader evaluation systems that will be implemented in the Race to the Top districts in 2012-2013 will markedly and effectively improve both the professional practice of educators and student learning in Georgia.

The GaDOE and the Governor's Office will continue to work together to develop and implement highly effective evaluation systems for teachers and leaders. The GaDOE will meet the conditions set forth in US ED's letter of July 2, 2012, and Georgia anticipates US ED's collaboration in identifying appropriate technical assistance to ensure our success in this work.

Sincerely,

John D. Barge
State School Superintendent

Sincerely,

Nathan Deal
Governor of Georgia