THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT / THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK / ALBANY, NY 12234

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER
OFFICE OF SCHOOL INNOVATION
ROOM 475 EBA
Tel. 518/474-4817
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January 30, 2013

Dr. Pamela Brown, Superintendent
Buffalo City School District
419 City Hall
Buffalo, NY 14202

Re: Notice of Award: Systemic Supports for District and School Turnaround Grant
                                    Round 2
        Award Amount: $2,268,290
        Time Period: February 1, 2013 to August 31, 2014

Dear Superintendent Brown:

The New York State Education Department, School Turnaround Office (NYSED STO) is pleased to inform you that the Buffalo City School District has been approved for the above referenced grant. As a reminder, if your district's approved APPR is set to expire prior to the end of the grant, subsequent APPR plans must obtain and maintain Commissioner approval with no break in force or effect, in order for the grant to remain in good standing.

The NYSED STO will serve as your lead program office for project oversight, assistance, monitoring, and reporting. Within the next several weeks you will be contacted by a representative from NYSED STO to set up an initial welcome and introduction telephone call.

We look forward to working with you and your leadership team on this innovative opportunity to improve student achievement in underperforming schools.

Sincerely,

Sally Bachofer

c: Sandra Herndon
      Owen Donovan

I. Executive Summary

The landscape for education in Buffalo, and throughout this country, has changed dramatically in the last decade. The 2002 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act brought a new focus to serving students through measures of Adequate Yearly Progress and a focus on subgroups so that a school could not hide diminished academic progress of a few groups of students. As the nation experienced an economic decline, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funneled billions to states and school districts with a specific emphasis on turning around low-performing schools. The level of effort required by districts to implement these policies was historic.

In order to successfully meet the requirements demanded by these new policies, districts needed two critical resources—leadership and funding. In the last 2 years, Buffalo Public Schools implemented a variety of supports and structures for our schools, through funding from specific grant opportunities. With leadership in transition and overall funding scarce, we have not progressed as far on the implementation of whole-scale district transformation. That said, we have had success in focused areas that we intend to leverage, such as our work developing data systems and structures.

This is all starting to change.

The opportunity provided by this support from New York State Department of Education is well timed with the arrival of a new superintendent for Buffalo City School District. We will now have the critical resources of leadership and funding needed to implement necessary structural changes and provide important capacity building supports to create a highly effective team to support our Priority Schools. Because this is a critical need within our district where much work needs to be done, much our grant funding will be focused in this area.

In addition, we have opted to apply some funds to the area of data-driven decision making because a relatively small amount of additional funds can have a large impact on the work we have already started. We have made substantial progress in building a data warehouse to capture a variety of academic, social, and demographic information about our students. With the resources this grant will provide, we will be able to refine our data warehouse in order to have a robust set of indicators to identify interventions for students. Once the data warehouse is transformed to a true Early Warning System, District funds from the School Improvement Grants will help underwrite much-needed training and support for school leaders, beginning with 13 priority schools, on selecting and implementing specific interventions indicated by the data. Ultimately, this will solidify our capacity to implement and effectively use an Early Warning System to prevent our students from dropping out.

With these resources, we will begin to reverse our growing list of low performing schools and realize our vision for a thriving educational model for urban districts.