ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER
OFFICE OF SCHOOL INNOVATION
ROOM 475 EBA
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August 28, 2012

Bruce Karam, Superintendent
Utica City School District
106 Memorial Parkway
Utica, NY 13501

RE: Notice of Award: Systemic Supports for District and School Turnaround Grant
     Award Amount: $224,055
     Time Period: September 1, 2012 to August 31, 2014

Dear Superintendent Karam:

The New York State Education Department, School Turnaround Office (NYSED STO) is pleased to inform you that Utica City School District has been approved for the above referenced grant. As stated in the initial grant application, this award is contingent upon the submission and approval of the final Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the LEA and the partners no later than November 30, 2012.

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: Owen Donovan

Proposal Narrative of Systemic Support for District and School Turnaround

I. Executive Summary

The Utica City School District is currently defined as a District in Need of Improvement. Over the past years each building has been persistent in its efforts to improve in areas of weakness as reported by SQR and JIT reports. In the elementary buildings, these areas include: understanding the economically disadvantaged, differentiated instruction, data driven instruction, ESL, SWD, and increased student engagement. We have not, however, approached our improvement efforts from the bottom up; that is, starting with the elementary buildings. This approach might better ensure student improvement, specifically for the K-6 schools, but over time for the district as a whole.   10 of our 10 elementary buildings fall below the state's benchmarks in both ELA and math assessments.

Building	2012 ELA % Passing	2012 Math % Passing	ESL % of Total	SWD % of Total Populatio	Free/Reduced Lunch %	Status
Albany	40	50	12.5	14.4	79	Good Standing
Columbus	42	48	18.7	13.2	85	Focused
Conkling	37	36	25.7	18.1	89	Good Standing
Herkimer	42	48	12.2	15.4	72	Focused
Hughes	31	32	18.0	18.6	88	Focused
Jefferson	34	46	19.1	15	77	Focused
Jones	53	55	8.0	18.8	48	Good Standing
Kernan	29	38	15	19.2	94	Focused
Martin Luther King	18	27	15.4	27.5	98	Priority
Watson-Williams	33	45	15.7	18.2	95	Focused

We also have not yet approached our improvement efforts by focusing on the leaders of those elementary buildings. Since school and district leaders play crucial and unique roles in ensuring meaningful changes, it makes sense to embrace the idea of systemic change by re-framing the current district systems and the systems of the ten elementary schools to improve student academic performance and hold both the school leaders and the district accountable for gains in performance.

The UCSD has already embraced NYS Common Core Standards in both English and math. This past year as per State Education Department recommendation, all district principals arranged to train their teachers in close readings and directed each teacher to create and submit evidence of two close reading lessons. In addition, all principals were trained in data-driven instruction, and every school formed a School Based Data

Inquiry Team to examine data. The district's K-12 English Language Arts Curriculum was revised in 2009 to include a series of common assessments for each grade level. Similarly the math curriculum was revised in 2010 and also includes a series of common assessments. The data from these assessments are collected and used by the SBIT teams. Both the curriculum and the assessments are reviewed and revised yearly— most recently to reflect the 6 shifts in ELA and the 6 shifts in math. Many buildings have advanced in the data-driven process to the point of structuring data days after each assessment for grade level teams to examine trends and create re-teaching opportunities for areas of weakness. What has been missing, however, is the unified approach to all these improvement efforts across all ten elementary buildings. With so many recent changes through the Regents reform agenda, there has been little opportunity to share successes and discuss failures in these improvement efforts with the goal of learning from them and therefore creating more consistent experiences for all students no matter which school they attend.

Receiving the Systemic Supports for Districts and School Grant would provide the Utica City School District with a chance to closely examine and develop leadership capacity in the elementary buildings. Through a 2-year partnership with American Institutes for Research, the UCSD will have an opportunity to fill the gap between what we are currently doing well and what we should be doing better. AIR will guide district staff and the principals of the ten elementary buildings by teaching school leadership teams how to implement a disciplined approach to transforming the elementary schools. Their approach will be on two levels: district and school.

On the district level, AIR will support the development of a district team with clear roles, accountabilities, and tools for success. District leaders' understanding of leadership skills and competencies will be strengthened in order to drive school improvement for all schools and particularly for those schools identified as needing improvement. Finally district level staff will be given greater proficiency and skill in monitoring the implementation of turnaround and improvement strategies and student outcomes.

At the school level, AIR will support the development of a focused and functional leadership team in each school. They, too, will be given clear roles, accountabilities, and tools for success. The building leadership teams will create implementation plans for kicking off school improvement or turnaround initiatives (depending on current status), and will be trained in documenting quick wins at the school level. A communication plan for effective engagement with stakeholders at each school will be created. Finally, a system of mid-course corrections will be put into action in order to deepen or adjust the implementation of improvement initiatives. These corrections will be based on a timely review of data by both the district and school teams.

From September 2012 until August 2014, American Institutes for Research would help the Utica City School District achieve the turnarounds and improvements by building the leadership capacity of the elementary schools and of the district.
Year 1 (September 2012 to August 2013) will begin with a two-day leadership academy for district and school leaders. During year 1, there will be four additional full day

workshops. School and district leaders will be trained to use data to evaluate implementation, determine the effectiveness of initiatives, and establish necessary practices and protocols for understanding the meaning of appropriate data to drive decision-making. A coach will be assigned for both years to assist in implementation of workshop content and in turnaround efforts by addressing school specific issues and concerns.

Year 1 will provide intensive support and coaching and will focus on the following:

- Identifying strengths and weaknesses of participants' turnaround leadership competencies and developing turnaround leadership skills

- Building individual and collective efficacy of the leadership teams and school staff

- Establishing a shared vision of successful turnaround/improvement and of the indicators that will be monitored

- Refining and concentrating the focus of turnaround and improvement initiatives

- Establishing necessary practices and protocols and employing appropriate data collection tools to garner relevant data to identify struggling students, inform instruction, and guide professional learning

- Learning about the connection between implementation and outcomes and reflecting on current levels of implementation surrounding school and district strategies

Year 2 (September 2013 to August 2014) will focus on going deeper with implementation plans and the development of turnaround and improvement leadership competencies and skills. AIR will assist leaders to build on the effective use of data and will begin to look more closely at the effectiveness of tiered interventions and at serving students who continue to struggle when first-tier instruction is not successful. Coaching will be differentiated to induct new school leaders to the system.

Year 2 will differentiate support and coaching and will focus on the following:

- Inducting and orienting new staff into turnaround and improvement initiatives, school practices, and lessons learned

- Fostering individual and collective efficacy through case studies and the sharing of successes

- Building on established data practices to monitor student progress and to intervene with struggling students, including students with disabilities and English Language Learners

- Continuing support and coaching in developing turnaround leadership competencies

- Deepening the implementation of turnaround and improvement strategies and monitoring implementation

Depending on progress made in Year 1, the following might also be a focus in Year 2

- Providing guidance in the initial selection or development of an instructional coaching program. Leader cohorts would be trained to use a toolkit of materials to guide the design and development of an instructional coaching program.

- Aligning summer school programs to support the learning needs of students and the improvement priorities of the school and district.

- Developing a process for identifying and inducting new staff members into turnaround schools.

- Building on established data practices to include deeper ties to interventions.

- Deepening the implementation of specific turnaround/improvement strategies and monitoring implementation.

The ultimate goal of this proposed systemic change is, of course, improved student achievement and competence for all of our elementary students including our considerable ELL and SWD population. By developing the leadership capacities of both district and elementary school leaders through targeted professional development, the UCSD leaders will be armed with specific turnaround/improvement tools and strategies required to create the desired impact on student achievement. A final effect, years beyond the scope of this grant, will be increased performance in the middle schools and the high school, increased graduation rates, and individual successes in college and careers.