



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

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER
OFFICE OF SCHOOL INNOVATION
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September 17, 2012

Laurence Spring, Superintendent
Schenectady City School District
108 Education Dr.
Schenectady, New York 12303

RE: Notice of Award: Systemic Supports for District and School Turnaround Grant
Award Amount: \$1,062,290
Time Period: September 1, 2012 to August 31, 2014

Dear Superintendent Spring:

The New York State Education Department, School Turnaround Office (NYSED STO) is pleased to inform you that the Schenectady 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

Schenectady City School District Systemic Supports for District and School Turnaround September 14, 2012

I. Executive Summary

The Schenectady City School District (SCSD) serves over 9,700 students in 18 schools. The SCSD is a high poverty urban school system with an overall **free and reduced lunch rate of 81%** (as of June 2012). With a student body that is 36% black, 15% Asian, 15% Hispanic, and 34% white; the SCSD is a linguistically and culturally diverse district with students from around the world including many originating from Afghanistan, Guyana, and several Caribbean nations.

The SCSD has been identified as a Focus District for student achievement gaps for students with disabilities, black students and Hispanic students. Schenectady High School has been identified as a Persistently Lowest Achieving School. Hamilton Elementary, Lincoln Elementary and Mont Pleasant Middle School have been identified as Priority Schools, and all remaining schools are Focus Schools.

All SCSD schools have completed an Education Systems Review Process and schools identified prior to the 2012/2013 school year have completed the School Quality Review. Significant student achievement gaps exist in all schools; these gaps are disproportional across our highly diverse student body. There is a significant need to 1) strengthen capacity to utilize equity-based data to make programmatic, personnel, and resource allocation decisions in schools throughout the district; 2) improve capacity to meet the needs of diverse student populations; 3) develop new programmatic systems directed to reduce achievement gap patterns; 4) strengthen capacity for curriculum improvement to align with the Common Core State Learning Standards and address the needs of diverse student populations. Aligning data systems and developing assessments is an integral part of the process for systemic change.

To affect systemic turnaround in all schools and across all student sub-groups, the Schenectady City School District proposes to work with a partnership led by New York University's Metropolitan Center for Urban Education. Supporting partners for this systemic turnaround process will include: the District Management Council, the New York State Technology Enterprise Corporation (NYSTEC), Learning Technology Visions, and the Northeast Regional Information Center (NERIC). *Please see attached systemic turnaround model diagram.*

New York University's Metropolitan Center for Urban Education (Metro Center) is a comprehensive, university-based center that focuses on educational research, policy, and practice. They have served as a partner and resource at the local and national levels in strengthening and improving access, opportunity, and the quality of education in schools. Its mission is to target issues related to educational equity by providing leadership and support to students, parents, teachers, administrators, and policy makers.

For 40 years, the Metro Center has been a transformational force inspiring positive change in schools, districts, and regions across the country. Metro Center is powerfully focused on driving equity and access in urban, suburban, and rural school settings - especially when confronting issues of race, gender, and national origin. Under the visionary leadership of Dr. Pedro Noguera,

Executive Director, Peter L. Agnew Professor of Education, and Professor of Teaching and Learning, Metro Center is continually expanding and evolving its services. Persistence of vision has forged Metro Center into a nationally recognized leader in educational equity. Its comprehensive programs serve a wide range of constituencies - more than 5,000 classroom staff impacting 125,000 students, as well as 2,800 parents and 61 agencies, schools, and school districts.

By selecting the Metro Center as our lead partner, we are very clearly stating that data systems and leadership efforts must serve the mission of eliminating Race, Economics and Disability as predictors of student achievement. It is not enough to simply have better data systems; they must serve the higher purpose that the Metro Center is skilled at developing.

Our partners from the Metro Center will train staff in how to lead and manage a system to close achievement gaps and improve instruction for all students. Our other partners will help us create the quality elements of that system – instructional design elements, assessments and data systems.

During the 2012-14 school years, Metro Center will provide the following technical assistance support to district and school leadership including: 1) root cause and data analysis process; 2) curriculum improvement and intervention process; 3) data management process; and 4) executive planning process. The principal investigator for Metro Center's lead partnership role will be Dr. Edward Fergus. Metro Center's support will involve coordination of partners for cohesive district-wide systemic turnaround, targeted professional development, review and timely feedback of program documents, and analysis of targeted network and district level data. Metro Center will provide continuous technical assistance support to the SCSD throughout the two-year program implementation period to establish ongoing capacity in the classroom, building and district levels.

District Management Council will focus their expertise on educational inquiry and equity on the needs of students with disabilities to improve the District Special Education Program. The District Management Council will provide an opportunity review to support quality systems improvements addressing: 1) consistent eligibility and exit criteria for students receiving Special Education services; 2) quality reading instruction and research-based intervention to prevent the need for student classification; 3) scheduling and staffing; and 4) the role of paraprofessionals.

The current district data systems often make analysis more complicated and cumbersome than it should be. The district has multiple data systems that do not communicate with the other systems. The SCSD's primary data systems include: *Performance Plus* (assessment system), *E-School* and *Clear Track* (student information systems), *Finance Manager* (finance and human resource systems), and *Trans-Finder* (transportation). This project will allow the district to develop and implement a robust system for data driven inquiry and evidence-based decision making processes. These processes require data integrity and the ability to integrate previously disconnected pieces of information.

The New York State Technology Enterprise Corporation (NYSTEC) will help identify technology solutions to adapt to the changing technology needs of systemic turnaround process

by: 1) documenting the requirements for student accountability; 2) documenting the requirements for teacher and principal effectiveness; 3) defining and documenting the requirements of the integrated database; 4) defining and documenting the requirements for additional data entry or import; 5) defining and documenting data analysis and report requirements; 6) preparing bid documents for an integrator to create the desired system(s); and 7) providing support for system implementation and testing.

Learning Technology Visions will assist SCSD by providing comprehensive and systematic analyses of what we are doing with assessments and data and how we can change what we are doing to make better short and long-term uses of data as a means for driving instruction, allocating resources and making operational program improvements. Learning Technology Visions will provide technical support for implementing APPR requirements so that such data is accessible for decision making on the classroom, school and district levels.

NERIC is a data liaison serving school districts in Albany, Schoharie, Schenectady and Saratoga Counties. With so much of a district's daily business hinging on the accuracy of data, NERIC has positioned itself as a resource for the efficient data mining, organization and analysis of school district data, from student records to payroll. NERIC helps school districts understand and adapt to evolving state requirements, and provides districts with services that allow districts to submit highly accurate data quickly, as well as data mining for information that helps classroom instruction evolve to meet the needs of students. NERIC's Systems and Network Technical Coordinator will work on site, addressing district's technology needs. The data/systems specialist will support the technical and instructional staff development needs of district and building leaders.