

September 5, 2002

MEMORANDUM

To: Mr. Dalton B. Floyd, Jr., Chairman, and Members, Commission on Higher Education

From: Ms. Dianne Chinnes, Chairman, Committee on Academic Affairs and Licensing

Consideration of *Guidelines* for Centers of Excellence Competitive Grants Program, FY 2003-04

Background

The Education Improvement Act of 1984 provides for the establishment of a contract program with public and private colleges in South Carolina to foster the development of “Centers of Excellence” in particular areas of need related to teacher education. State funding is provided for up to four years at a decreasing rate each year with the goal of establishing statewide resource centers that gradually will be supported totally by institutional and external funding sources. There are currently fifteen Centers of Excellence, although only four receive State funding. (A list of Centers is attached to the enclosed *Guidelines*.)

For FY 2003-04, the *Guidelines* have been substantially changed to reflect the needs identified by the Education Oversight Committee and its Education Improvement Act Subcommittee. These committees have noted the dire need for assistance from higher education institutions directed towards low performing schools and districts. Towards this goal, the *Guidelines* have been modified to focus professional development and teacher education activities on low performing schools/districts and the improvement of student achievement. This differs from previous *Guidelines* that focused primarily on pre-service education with professional development having a secondary position. The new *Guidelines* focus on the needs of low performing schools and how institutions of higher education can assist these schools in raising student academic achievement.

Research has shown that the single most important factor in student achievement is teacher quality. The new *Guidelines* will allow institutions of higher education to assist the State in its endeavors to improve the quality of education at the State's low performing schools and districts.

Outlined below are the major changes to the program's requirements included in the attached *Guidelines*:

- Proposals must demonstrate the institutional commitment to the project in terms of a campus-wide effort focused on low performing districts or schools, development of a state-of-the-art resource center, and modeling of the activities in its own teacher education program.
- Each center must demonstrate a commitment to offering a sustained, high-quality professional development program for teachers tied to state content and assessment standards that is focused on low performing schools and districts. The proposed activities must be based on proven instructional practice for raising the academic achievement of students.
- The proposal must clearly identify the low performing districts and schools that will be the focus of the proposed activities. The targeted districts and schools must be included in the proposal planning process.
- The proposal must demonstrate how the project will assist both in-service and pre-service teachers in working effectively with students in low performing schools and with diverse needs.
- The proposal's professional development activities must be aligned with the S.C. Professional Development Standards.
- Proposals should include other Centers of Excellence in the delivery of services and programs.
- Collaboration with other education stakeholders, including other school districts and/or schools, other institutions of higher education, professional education associations, parents and parent groups, and the private sector, is strongly encouraged.
- Institutions must demonstrate a funding commitment to a proposed center for at least six years, one year beyond the five-year State funding period. Because the intent of the Centers of Excellence Program is to create long-

lasting, institutionalized resource centers for the state, the partners should seek institutional or external support to continue the targeted programs.

- The *Guidelines* indicate that the Commission is seeking innovative proposals that will not only support state efforts in raising academic achievement levels but will also enhance the teacher training programs at the host institution.

The attached *Guidelines* include priority areas that are substantially different from previous years. These priority areas are summarized below and reflect the changes in the focus of the program:

- developing teacher training and professional development programs that use proven instructional practices and activities that focus on raising the academic achievement of students at low-performing schools and among students with diverse needs. This training must be tied to state content and assessment standards.
- assisting teachers at low performing schools in the use of classroom-based assessments that are linked to providing intervention and assistance to enable students to meet state academic standards
- developing innovative models for Professional Development Schools (PDS) at low performing schools. The PDS should incorporate and integrate the standards of the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education's PDS Standards. The PDS should also focus on increasing the number of teachers appropriately prepared to work effectively with students in low-performing schools and with diverse needs.
- developing innovative school leadership training and support, especially at the middle grade level, that prepare administrators to have a comprehensive understanding of school and classroom practices that contribute to student achievement, to know how to work with teachers and others (especially teamed approaches), to develop and implement strategies that ensure continuous student improvement, and to know how to provide necessary support for staff to carry out sound school, curriculum, and instructional practices.
- preparing teachers and schools to work and communicate actively and effectively with parents, parent support groups (PTOs, School Improvement Councils, etc.), and community members to assist in supporting the learning environment of all students.

- developing **innovative** reading training programs that will improve instruction at the pre-school through middle school levels at low performing schools. Such training programs should be designed to assist teachers in working with parents to support student learning and provide additional opportunities that expand beyond classroom instruction. Teacher education and arts and sciences students should be included in providing services to the low-performing schools.
- developing innovative after-school and weekend support programs for low-achieving and at-risk students. Such programs should include teacher education and arts and sciences students in providing services to the target population.

Recommendation

The staff recommends that the Committee on Academic Affairs and Licensing commend these *Guidelines* favorably to the Commission for FY 2003-04. The Committee will consider this item at its meeting on September 4 and will make its recommendation to the Commission on September 5.

Attachment: Centers of Excellence *Guidelines*