

May 4, 2006

**MEMORANDUM**

**To:** Dr. Layton McCurdy, Chair, and Members, Commission on Higher Education

**From:** Dr. Vermelle Johnson, Chairman, and Members, Committee on Academic Affairs and Licensing

**Informational Report on New Award for FY 2005-06  
Center of Excellence (Education) Program**

**Background**

Requests for Proposals for Centers of Excellence for the FY 2006-07 project year were issued to all eligible public and private institutions in September 1, 2005. At the request of the Education Oversight Committee, proposals were requested that focus on literacy in adolescent education. Five proposals were received for consideration:

- ❖ Clemson University  
Center of Excellence for Genetics and Life Science
- ❖ College of Charleston  
Center of Excellence for the Advancement of New Literacies in Middle Grades
- ❖ Furman University  
Center of Excellence in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of other Language)
- ❖ Lander University  
Center for Excellence in Adolescent Literacy and Learning
- ❖ University of South Carolina Aiken  
Center of Excellence for Language Literacy in Science (CELLS)

A Review Panel consisting of one high school English teacher, two representatives from higher education, one representative from the Department of Education, one representative from the Middle Level Teacher Education Initiative and one staff member from the Commission on Higher Education was appointed to review the proposals and to make recommendations. The Panel Report is attached (**Attachment 1**). The Panel was chaired by Dr. Ronald Joekel, a professor from the University of Nebraska. The report of the Review Panel is attached (**Attachment 2**). Abstracts for the five proposed Centers are also attached (**Attachment 3**).

## **Discussion**

The Review Panel met on March 13, 2006, to receive presentations from the representatives from each institution and discuss the merits of each proposed center. The panel's recommendation is to fund the proposed center from the College of Charleston. The panel members conducted a lengthy discussion about the proposals and concluded that the proposed center from the College of Charleston rated the highest in the panel's discussion. The purpose of the Center of Excellence for the Advancement of New Literacies in Middle Grades is to ultimately increase the literacy/reading development of diverse and struggling middle school students and their teachers in the Charleston County School District by improving school culture and engagement in learning through school-wide focus of the impact on literacy across all content areas that will result in a New Literacies in Middle Grades Model that can be disseminated across the state to school districts and colleagues. The project addressed both the pre-service and in-service aspects of increasing middle level teachers' understanding and knowledge of improving education in literacy for middle level students.

The amount of the award for the first year for a new center is:

❖ College of Charleston	\$150,000
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The proposed centers from USC-Aiken, Furman University, Lander University, and Clemson University had salient features and potential, but the panel was charged with selecting one proposal they felt had the most promise to fulfill the purpose of the Center of Excellence Program Guidelines and improving the literacy/reading of middle level students. In FY 2005-06, the S.C. General Assembly approved the Commission's request for an appropriation of \$685,657. With five centers in the second, third, and fourth years of funding, funding is available for only one new for FY 2006-07.

The proposed center from USC-Aiken, a Center of Excellence for Language Literacy in Science (CELLS), was strongly considered for funding. The purpose of the center was to develop and model state-of-the-art in-service and pre-service training programs that concentrated on literacy/reading and science at the middle school level.

The proposal appeared to stray away from the title of the Center, which stated language literacy in science. Yet, in reading the proposal, the panel found social studies, math, and English/LA related to the sciences. The proposal needed more specificity in regard to strategies to help teachers identify the needs of middle level schools and strategies of instruction in literacy.

The proposed Center of Excellence in TESOL from Furman University also had strong potential for funding. The Center would provide year-long, sustainable professional development to increase student achievement for diverse learners through TESOL, enhanced literacy across the curriculum, and instructional strategies that incorporate advanced technology and needs of all learners. The panel was impressed with the uniqueness of the proposal and appreciated the passion that Dr. Troy Terry exhibited in his presentation. The proposal guidelines called for middle level literacy and the panel felt that the Furman proposal didn't address this sufficiently.

A Center of Excellence for the Enhancement of Middle School Literacy was proposed by Lander University. The primary purpose of the Center was to provide enhanced literacy opportunities for areas middle school learners through technology, infusion of literacy across content areas, and accommodating and supporting the needs of a broad spectrum of diverse learners. A unique aspect of the proposal was the inclusion of Special Education pre-service students at Lander University. The panel felt the proposal did not provide enough specificity in how it would promote middle level literacy for students. Goals and objectives were not specified and it was difficult to get a sense of the project other than in broad generalities. A concern was expressed that there did not appear to be a faculty member with expertise in middle level education as a member of the center team. It wasn't clear to the panel what scholarships for special education students would do to contribute to the improvement of literacy for middle level students.

Clemson University proposed the creation of a Center of Excellence in Genetics and Life Sciences. The purpose of the center was to develop a comprehensive and innovative program to improve instruction in science literacy/reading levels at middle schools that failed to meet Adequate Yearly Progress. The review panel found this proposal intriguing, but missing the basic need of addressing literacy/reading for middle level students. There was a strong academic emphasis on science content, but meeting the needs of low achieving middle school students was lacking. Evidence of a stronger relationship to the College of Education was felt to be needed for such a project to truly meet the needs of middle level students. Little attention was given to specific strategies of instruction to identify and meet the based needs of middle level teachers and adolescents in transition. The proposal guidelines called for emphasis on improving the literacy/reading of low achieving middle level students and this proposal appears to be a means to continue programs already in existence with a strong academic content the

driving force rather than focusing on the needs of improving the literacy of low achieving middle level students.

These proposals have been referred to the Commission's *Improving Teacher Quality Competitive Grants Program* and urged to adopt their proposals to the requirements of that program, and submit them for funding, or, they might revise the proposals and resubmit to next year's Center of Excellence (Education) competition.

In keeping with authority previously delegated to it by the Commission, the Committee on Academic Affairs and Licensing accepted the Review Panel's recommendation and approved an award to the College of Charleston to establish the "Center of Excellence for the Advancement of New Literacies in Middle Grades" in the amount of \$150,000, pending submission of 1) the appropriate support letters of commitment from low-performing districts/schools; 2) a revised assessment; and 3) a plan of action for specific teaching strategies for literacy/reading for middle school students.

This report is being presented to the Commission for information.