

October 5, 2006

MEMORANDUM

To: Dr. Layton R. McCurdy, Chairman, and Members, Commission on Higher Education

From: Dr. Betty Rose Horne, Chair, and Members, Committee on Academic Affairs and Licensing

Consideration of
Guidelines for the Commission on Higher Education's
Centers of Excellence Competitive Grants Program (Teacher Education)
Project Year 2007-08

Background

The *Education Improvement Act of 1984* provides for the establishment of a contract program with public or 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 five years at a decreasing rate each year with the goal of establishing statewide resource centers that address the needs of high need schools and districts. There are currently seventeen Centers of Excellence. Only six of these receive EIA State funding, the other 11 Centers continue to operate through support from the institutions and other grants. (A list of Centers is attached to the enclosed *Guidelines*.)

The *Guidelines* were substantially changed for the FY 2003-04 proposal competition. The Education Oversight Committee and its Education Improvement Act Subcommittee indicated the need for higher education institutions to become more actively involved with low performing schools and districts. The *Guidelines* were changed to address this need and require that a Center must focus its activities on low performing schools and districts. The FY 2007-08 *Guidelines* include a list of low performing schools and districts derived from the Education Accountability Act Report

Card data for 2005. The target schools and districts are those that have an overall rating of Below Average or Unsatisfactory and a Poverty Index of 25 percent or greater. A summary of the requirements contained in the FY 2007-08 *Guidelines* is provided below:

- Proposals must demonstrate an institutional commitment to work with low performing schools and districts to assist them in raising student academic achievement. The Commission is seeking proposals that involve faculty and students from across the entire campus in a concerted effort of assistance.
- Each Center should also demonstrate a commitment to offering sustained, high-quality professional development programs in its area of expertise. This component of the *Guidelines* has been re-structured as to be aligned with the Education Oversight Committee's (EOC) focus on improving the quality of teaching in the State's low performing schools. For FY 2007-08, the priority areas are aligned with the EOC's focus on increasing high school graduation rates by improving PACT scores at the middle level in the four content areas (math, ELA, Social Studies, and Science) that will improve instruction at the middle school level in low performing schools.
- A proposed Center must offer activities and strategies that are tied to State content and assessment standards and the S.C. Professional Development Standards.
- Collaboration on the proposal's design must occur with a low performing school or district. In addition, the proposal may work with other education stakeholders, including other schools and districts, other higher education institutions, other Centers of Excellence, professional education associations, parent groups, and the private sector.
- The Center must have a well-defined plan for achievement. This plan should be tied to raising the academic achievement levels of the students at the target school(s) and district(s).
- Institutions must demonstrate a funding commitment to a proposed center for at least six years, one year beyond the five-year State funding period either through institutional or external support. The intent of the Centers of Excellence Program is to create long-lasting, institutionalized resource centers for the State that will have an impact on K-12 schools.
- The Center must demonstrate that it is using innovative practices that are based on sound research and have been shown to be successful in improving student achievement.

Funding for the one new center in FY 2007-08 at the current level of funding is contingent upon an increase in budget from the Education Oversight Committee for this program.

Institutions working with eligible districts and schools are encouraged to consult the *Improving Teacher Quality Higher Education Grants Guidelines* for additional funding information focused on professional development programs.

The attached *Guidelines* are identical to the ones used for FY 2006-07 except for the changes in the priority areas that will support the EOC's activities for FY 2007-08 (page five of the *Guidelines*). For your ease, staff recommended changes from the 2006-07 guidelines are noted in the attached document as tracked changes. These *Guidelines* will be posted on the Commission's web site for access by institutions.

Recommendation

The Committee on Academic Affairs and Licensing recommends that the Commission approve these *Guidelines for the Centers of Excellence Competitive Grants Program (Teacher Education) Project Year 2007-08*.

Attachment: Draft Guidelines for Centers of Excellence (RFP) FY 2007-08 (Teacher Education)