

September 4, 2003

**MEMORANDUM**

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

**From :** Dr. Vermelle J. Johnson, 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 2004-05**

**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, although only four still receive State funding. (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 had 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 Commission's web site provides a list of low performing schools and districts derived from the Education Accountability Act Report Card data for 2002. The target schools and districts are those that have an overall rating of Average or below and a Poverty Index of 25 percent or greater. A summary of the requirements contained in the *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 so as to be aligned with the Education Oversight Committee's focus on improving the quality of teaching in the State's 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 are proven to be successful in improving student achievement.

The attached *Guidelines* are similar to the ones used for FY 2003-04 and include the same priority areas. These *Guidelines* will be posted on the Commission's web site for access by institutions.

**Recommendation**

The staff suggests that the Committee on Academic Affairs and Licensing commend these *Guidelines* favorably to the Commission.

The Committee will make its recommendation to the Commission on September 4.

**Attachment:** Guidelines for the Centers of Excellence (Teacher Education)