MARYLAND STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Preparing World-Class Students

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TO: Members of the State Board of Education

FROM: Lillian M. Lowery, Ed.D.

DATE: December 17, 2012

SUBJECT: Race to the Top Program Evaluation

PURPOSE:

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) decided during the application writing phase of its Race to the Top grant proposal that it needed an external, independent evaluation of the overall program. As such MSDE chose to engage the services of the Center for Application and Innovation Research in Education (CAIRE) at Towson University.

BACKGROUND:

From March through September 2012, representatives of the CAIRE Team met regularly with MSDE Race to the Top project managers to discuss the process/product phase of the projects sponsored by MSDE. The purpose of these meetings was to review and document the status of each project from a management perspective, identify any risks associated with its completion, and if warranted, make recommendations to MSDE leaders to improve the project's management.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

CAIRE found that on the whole, the projects reviewed appear to be well managed and on schedule. They also found that project managers had a good understanding of the relationships among projects, and were aware of hard dependencies that might pose a risk to the completion of their project. They were also aware of the various stakeholders and had made an effort from the beginning of their project to solicit ideas and feedback from them. Project managers indicated that the procedures put in place to resolve issues were effective.

The financial controls established by MSDE for projects were also reviewed in March 2012. The only risk identified at that time was that project managers were having difficulty simultaneously tracking project expenditures on both a Federal and State fiscal year basis. In response, MSDE hired additional fiscal staff who assumed major responsibility for tracking project expenditures. Subsequent to the report's issuance, MSDE learned that USDE would accept reports on a State fiscal basis, and did not have to also report on a Federal fiscal year basis. This conversion is currently taking place.

In regard to other risks identified through reviews, delays in the State's procurement process were mentioned a number of times. Most projects started late because of delays in expending federal funding in Year 1, but were delayed again by longer-than-expected development and issuance of Requests for Proposals and/or procure products and services needed by projects. The lesson learned, as expressed by several MSDE representatives, is that project managers may need to allow additional time in their project schedules for procurement-related activities and manage them with increased attention to detail and monitoring.

CAIRE concluded that MSDE appears to be well equipped to mitigate or resolve any issues that may arise during the grant period. They also stated that MSDE is providing the oversight and managerial tools necessary to facilitate success of the RTTT projects. CAIRE will continue its evaluation through the impact stage to determine if the intended results from the overall reform effort are indeed achieved.

ACTION:

For information only; no action required