



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES



September 25, 2014

Deborah Gist
Commissioner
Rhode Island Department of Education
255 Westminster St.
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Commissioner Gist,

This letter is in response to Rhode Island's request to amend its approved Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) grant projects. The U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (the Departments) approved Rhode Island's grant projects and scope of work on November 14, 2012. On September 5, 2014 the Rhode Island Department of Education submitted an amendment request, whereby it proposes to move funds within Project 2, Improving the Quality of Early Learning Programs, to assist programs with indoor and outdoor environment concerns.

As you are aware, the Departments have the authority to approve amendments provided that such a change does not alter the scope or objectives of the approved proposal. On July 18, 2012, the Departments sent a document to Project Directors describing the process by which amendments would be reviewed and approved or denied. To determine whether approval could be granted, the Departments have applied the conditions noted in that document and compared it with RTT-ELC program requirements and conditions.

In 2013, Rhode Island conducted a Facilities Needs Assessment to identify barriers for early learning providers in meeting regulatory standards and attaining higher ratings in its Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System (TQRIS). The resulting report indicated that more than 50% of Rhode Island's early learning providers have some indoor or outdoor environment issues that require technical assistance and financial support to resolve.

To address these needs, Rhode Island requests to procure a vendor to provide specialized assessment and technical assistance to early learning providers related to facilities concerns. The vendor will also award aligned program improvement grants to support minor renovations such as improving playgrounds or increasing natural light. Priority would be given to supporting compliance with regulations and remediating areas which pose risks to children's health and safety.

This amendment will move \$1 million within Project Two, Improving the Quality of Early Learning Programs, from Line 11 (Funding for Localities, etc.) to Line 8 (Contractual). The proposed budget provides \$325,000 in Year Three and \$675,000 in Year Four. An estimated 70 to 75 percent of these funds will be used for program improvement grants. These funds were

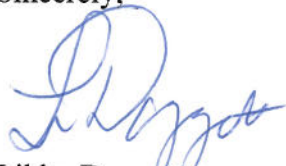
initially allocated for Quality Awards to reward providers with high TQRIS ratings. However, due to delays in determining ratings, and a lower number of eligible providers than anticipated, Rhode Island cannot spend these funds on Quality Awards as originally budgeted. This amendment will serve the important goal of improving program quality, resulting in programs attaining higher TQRIS ratings.

We understand that this amendment request will not impact Rhode Island's overall RTT-ELC goals, plans, outcomes, or performance measures, but will ensure Rhode Island can continue to make progress on its RTT-ELC scope of work activities.

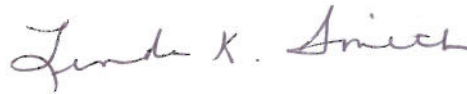
Please note that this letter will be posted on the Department of Education's website as a record of the amendment request and our approval. All budget changes are recorded in the GRADS 360 system and the detailed budget request is saved in the official grant file.

We are confident that Rhode Island will continue its comprehensive efforts towards building successful state systems of early learning. If you need any assistance regarding RTT-ELC, please do not hesitate to contact your Project Officer, Deborah Spitz, at (202) 260-3793 or Deborah.Spitz@ed.gov or your co-project officer Ngozi Onunaku, at (202) 260-5943 or Ngozi.Onunaku@acf.hhs.gov.

Sincerely,



Libby Doggett
Deputy Assistant Secretary
Office of Early Learning
Office of Elementary and Secondary
Education
U.S. Department of Education



Linda K. Smith
Deputy Assistant Secretary for Early
Childhood Development
Administration for Children and Families
U.S. Department of Health and Human
Services

CC: Melissa Emidy