

Questions and Answers

Led by: Maura Policelli, Senior Advisor for External Affairs
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Maura: So, a lot of information. Some of it you've all read and have memorized I'm sure. But why don't we pause here and on any of this information that we've presented, if there are questions then we have a microphone available. I think for recording purposes that may be helpful, even if you have a booming voice. So if there are any questions for any of us, fire away.

Zollie: The fourth one is financial incentives for teachers and principals that are managing those schools.

Maura: Financial incentives for teachers and principals who are managing those turn around schools.

Zollie: That's right.

Maura: This is really exciting. I sat in on some of the meetings where the thinking, Zollie was in many of these, the thinking put into how to make sure that for SFSF, SIG, and Race To The Top, that these models, partly why we put all the language on here, obviously not to read it to you, was just to make sure you knew that this exact language is what is in all three of these grants. We were all very excited, almost as excited as moving the SLDS deadline. To be able to offer all of you this element of consistency, because at different points in the process there were subtleties between them which we worked, I didn't, I can take no credit, the program officers worked very hard to align. So hopefully that's making your lives a little bit easier.

Zollie: That's a major silo adjustment.

Maura: That was a silo adjustment. We're breaking down the silos at the Department of Education and we're trying to help all you do that as well.

Question: So a successful applicant for the SIG grants, Zollie, would choose one of these four options and that's all.

Zollie: No, you actually, depending on the number of schools you have in your district, actually let's start with that. If it's more than nine then you have to select more than one model. So if you have more than nine schools that are in some stage of school improvement, corrective action, or restructuring and you're providing services to them through this grant, then you will have to choose more than one model, but if you have nine or less then you have the option of using only one.

Question: But you have to use one of these four.

Zollie: That's right. Those are the options. Again, we'll talk about this this afternoon. This is preliminary, but you'll also have to implement Tier I and Tier II. You have to identify Tier I schools and serve them and Tier II schools and serve them. At minimum you have to start with Tier I and have those selected and then also serve the Tier II to be eligible to have a successful application. If you have money left over then you can serve Tier III.

Maura: Just to read from some information about Race To The Top, again I'm just reading from what was on the transcript of the call on Monday, was that all four of the school intervention models are allowed in the final notice, although in large districts with ten or more turn arounds, the transformation model cannot be used in more than 50% of the schools. So just to make note of that.

Question: [Inaudible] screening [Inaudible] rural areas [Inaudible] impossible. What do you suggest we do?

Maura: We had a meeting just with the Secretary and the Deputy Secretary on Tuesday for rural superintendents, which was a very good meeting. It's a big emphasis for the Secretary in terms of reaching out to rural districts as well as states that have a lot of rural schools. In terms of folks in this, we did have a Michigan superintendent, South Dakota, so just two of the states represented here. So there's been a lot of talk around that and just I think the recognition is obviously that some of these models are going to be easier than others and so in terms of picking the one that's easiest for a rural school district is obviously going to be different than an urban school. So there's certainly a recognition that there are simply different challenges, especially with personnel and identifying those individuals and having access to enough teachers and principals who we consider effective. Those challenges are certainly there. The SIG and SFSF grants are formula, so that certainly doesn't change in terms of the amount of dollars coming from those programs. But we understand that the ability to compete for Race To The Top is unique, but just the big picture here, a good reform plan is a good reform plan. So whether the districts engaged with the state are mostly rural or urban, whether the state is mostly rural or urban, a good plan is a good plan and we recognize, I don't have to tell all of you, but the graduation rate for rural high schools is below 70%. I don't have to read all the statistics to you, and in some states the effort is around – but in some states it's above 90%, Nevada, Nebraska, Connecticut, New Jersey. So in terms of some states that are doing better with just in particular graduation rates for rural schools, we want to share best practices for those states whose numbers are not quite as good. But, the point being, a good plan is a good plan. If that's of any reassurance. And the capacity issue is actually a big part of that, we understand, and I think there's a lot of folks out there including our friends here who are trying to give that additional help in just the applying and the planning to rural areas that may not have a big team of people to help. Just so you know there's a lot of recognition in the department about those needs.

Question: First of all, being a data person it is so exciting all the opportunities in life these days. So, it's really great. I guess I have one practical question. On the SLDS grant, since the extension on the time line for it to be due, which was so exciting, any word on when they would be possibly announced in terms of being awarded? I didn't know if that date had changed.

Answer: No, is the short answer. We're still... I could go on about that, but yeah, we're probably announcing, I think, the reviewers are meeting in February, so we'll still give them two months to review it and then once they meet and then we work with the applicants for another month after that, so the announcement is probably going to be April, May, June.

Question: Another question I had, I haven't read all the SFSF stuff yet that has come out, but originally there was some information in there around doing some reporting on the teacher and principal performance evaluations and that type of thing and I know it was a hot topic in our state to talk about. I didn't know in the final information if there was any other guidance on that or where would be a good place to go to talk about how states are going to capture that data and standardize on reporting it.

Answer: With respect to teacher and principal evaluations, you'll find that in Section A of SFSF. I didn't go into this in detail, but Section A State Plans do require that you collect data from LEA's. They don't require you to force LEA's to change their evaluation practices. So if an LEA doesn't use student achievement data in teacher and principal evaluations, you as the state have to report that they do not, but you don't have to force them to start doing that for the purposes of SFSF. As far as collecting data from each LEA, it's certainly a state process and we definitely would encourage people to share best practices. We know some states have more uniform processes for evaluations than others. But the basic requirement is just collecting from each LEA what their practices are.

Question: I have a question and a request. The first question is, on the governor's conference call I think it was last Friday or last Thursday with Secretary Duncan, the question was asked about if you have to have all of your legislation in place to apply in Phase I of Race To The Top and I believe the initial answer was no and then Arnie Duncan was going to talk with the governor who raised the question and we'd like to know has a decision been made yet on that, if you have to have all the legislation in place in order to apply for Phase I?

Maura: In referring to the follow up call on Monday with Joanne Weiss, I believe that same question was answered or maybe she just presented it. But I'll read from her comments. Finally the third criteria asks states to tell us what laws, regulations or policies they have in place... I'm sorry, that's in terms of other than those we asked about in the application that contribute to creating conditions for the state. But I believe, I'm just going to verify that it is, nothing has changed in that regard in terms of what was in the NPP and that those laws do have to be in place. The answer is yes, I just wanted to find her exact words of it. I can quickly go back to what we had on here from her slides. But yes, they have to be in place. I know that a lot of comments came in during the comment period on that. But there has not been a change in that

requirement. Her exact explanation of that, under application requirement certification from State Attorney's description of state laws, state reform condition requirements, so obviously the specific one about no barriers between student performance data and teacher evaluation data, making sure there's no barrier there in terms of state laws remains a requirement.

Question: Then the request I would have is that, Zollie, during your session this afternoon, it would help Iowa out if we could hear from some other states about what they've done for the four models as far as what options would we have to not have to open up collective bargaining, because that's really an issue because once we open it up, it's not just about this, everybody is going to line up and so are there things states have done to avoid that in doing this, because right now that would be an issue for us and we're trying to figure out the way to do it without causing a lot of pain for everybody.

Answer: [Inaudible].

Question: First, are those transcripts available?

Maura: The transcripts, yes. The transcripts along with the slides from Monday afternoon session webinar are posted on our website as of yesterday. Because I got it as soon as it was posted. So the exact transcript is available.

Question: Being with one of the labs, one of the I guess tricky things is, we need to balance and coordinate. What does that really mean practically? So struggling schools is one of the four areas, yet as you indicated it's really an overlay. When one tries to write these proposals and build in that coherence and convince you all that a state has thought about that, we're having a hard time describing what that looks like to a state. So to have that one of four areas, yet it's the overlay. So how does one kind of present that? Have you thought that through at all? What would be a great shot at that when you see it? What would it look like?

Maura: One thing, and I think after we take a break, Zollie has some points to make about some other opportunities in terms of funding to align all of this and I'll have some specific planning suggestions, but at least in Race To The Top, it does – I don't know if it's called a requirement or an indicator – but it does request a plan for the state to explain how this fits in in terms of these other sources of funding and their overall planning and that is important in something that as we progress in our materials we'll be focusing more and more on which is the use of funds. So Race To The Top, it's a question to be asked whether Race To The Top exists or not and it's a question to be asked for any of these applications, but yes, how would your SIG... SIG is formula, SFSF is formula, so you already know that. How does the calculation of that funding, its purposes, its requirements, fit in to what you would propose your Race To The Top money would be used for. SLDS, how would those resources fit in in terms of providing some infrastructure for the data that's required for Race To The Top? So that question, again, there's no one answer for any state, but we're here to try to help with some of that thinking. This I'll bring up a little bit later, but clearly we don't want anybody to forget about the money that's

already on the street, the Title I and IDA money for the Recovery Act that is already out there. SFSF money from Phase I, some states have already used it all up because things have, the budgets have just been so dire. Others have not used it all yet. The EDTEC grants that are being administered at the district level, it's a little different in each state. They're not all big dollars, but the point is recognizing different pots of money and to the extent that they relate to these four reform areas, how are you as a state connecting those dots and making most efficient use of those different funds so you don't have one turn around program over here funded by SIG and one turn around program over here funded by Race To The Top. We all know that's inefficient. We at the Department have a particular eye towards that in our spirit of trying to break down the silos. Does that help, or no?

Question: [Inaudible] money on the table [Inaudible] coordinate [Inaudible]. What's the base [Inaudible]. [Inaudible] all of these then get coordinated to that somehow. I just haven't been able to think this through. [Inaudible].

Maura: Again, after we have a break we have some suggestions on the planning process itself. That was kind of our attempt. We recognize that some of you, for quite some time have been working for years on state plans of some sort, reform plans. Here comes the Obama administration and Arnie Duncan and we're giving you this new framework and there's this unprecedented money and it's exciting and it's overwhelming and you all have tough budgets and it's a new day, so your existing reform plans prior to January 2009 have some applicability to all of this and in other cases not. We know that you have, in many cases, you already have things in place and we're encouraging you to, and if you don't have something in place then this is a fresh opportunity, but to brush it off and hopefully it helps. We're hoping this framework helps to look at all of them feeding into this larger picture that focuses on the effective teaching and learning. The ultimate goal of the president to improve the career and college readiness of our students, that they're hopefully just kind of setting some big goals out there for you and as Zollie was mentioning in terms of SIG and the new emphasis on turn around models, instruction, experience in the classroom. Ultimately how does the student achievement improve through those different models? So this emphasis, this structure here, what is the environment for teachers to be effective and to get the support they need and to collaborate. How is the community involved? I think to some degree asking these questions, so to speak, around this framework, I guess it's five questions; what is our system capacity, how are we aligning our instruction, what is our school environment, how are we engaged in the community, what is our plan around really good teachers and leaders and how does this all create a very effective teaching and learning. I think asking those five questions as you pursue all of this could be a helpful framework. We're proposing, Trish and others are building ideas that could be helpful also, to just kind of organize your thoughts on this because it is a lot. Its different pots of money and a lot and we're trying to be helpful. But this is one suggested way to approach it. Does that help? (Yes) Okay.

Question: I have a very specific question. You know that high quality assessments and improving the quality of assessments run through all the grants and we've been assuming definitions about what high quality means and what improving or enhancing the quality of assessment means, but is there a definition that [Inaudible] has of what it means to have high quality assessments, and what it means to enhance the quality of the assessments?

Maura: One brilliant document, which is in the works, that our office of general counsel has been putting together, is trying to align the definitions in different grants. Again, we're thrilled to say that our turn around model definitions are exactly the same, but recognizing that in other cases they're not exactly the same and we want to help point out where they're not and why they're not. It's not willy nilly or to make you guys pull your hair out. There's rationale. So high quality assessment, they happen to have this in here, for SFSF and RTT, and this is going through refinement, so it's not publically available yet, but just as a quick comparison between those two grants, high quality assessment is defined in SFSF and obviously Jessica could be saying this, I just happen to be reading off the document, means that those assessments that have been peer reviewed and approved by the department. Is that accurate Jessica?

Jessica: Yes.

Maura: And what's referenced is standards and assessments. The state must collect and publicly report data and other information on whether students are provided high quality state assessments. So that's the definition and then where it's applied in that grant. So that's straightforward there. Again, SFSF is about collecting your information and then Race To The Top is about taking things a step further. So the definition for Race To The Top is a little bit longer. Is this worth me reading, it's about four sentences?

Jessica: It is defined in the application and the notice.

Maura: Yeah, it's in the notice, all of this is in the notice, but I'll just read the beginning of it. They have examples, but... High quality assessment in Race To The Top means an assessment designed to measure a student's knowledge, understanding of, and ability to apply critical concepts through the use of a variety of item types and formats. Then they have examples; open ended responses, performance based tasks. Such assessments should enable measurement of student achievement and student growth. Just a side note there. The issue of student growth you should pay attention to in terms of the alignment of that, which is from what I understand, a fairly new emphasis in terms of education funding. So I'll just leave it at that and all of this is in the notices. But it's obviously a distinction because Race To The Top is meant to say where we want you to go. SFSF is pretty straightforward, what do you currently have for measurements. But Race To The Top really shows where we'd like that to go in student growth I would just point out is a core element.

Question: I would really like to applaud your efforts to create some synergy with all these various grant applications. [Inaudible] because of that. Not that we don't have enough work to do already, but as you continue to do that synergy, I really hope you look at IDEA and Perkins and the CTE because we get diverted because they're not aligned. So applaud the efforts and please continue with additional grants.

Maura: Zollie will speak to this a little bit later, there's other money out there and we want all of it to connect as much as possible. Not every other grant is built around these four assurances, but there certainly are connections and we'll be encouraging it as much as possible. Making sure that Title I, SIG obviously is Title I, but making sure that Title I money, the first batch of our money, and IDEA, those folks are continually at the table. I don't think we have folks from IDEA or Title I here specifically from states, but both at the state and local level we just can't emphasize enough how much we really, really encourage you all to include those folks in your planning and your thinking, especially because Race To The Top generally speaking, as it's spelled out in the notice, because of its broad use of funds allows a little bit more collaboration between Title I plans and ideas and strategies and how Race To The Top can expand those, so to speak, to non-Title I schools. So that's kind of a beautiful thing. So a great idea and project in a Title I initiative could be fodder for the Race To The Top plan because we don't have to worry as much about there being a conflict there. Same obviously with IDEA technology, planning, data systems, plenty of good thinking from your IDEA folks and your EDTEC folks. Don't forget those wonderful... All the EDTEC folks came to DC not too long ago. I couldn't believe... I don't know why my expectations were low, that wasn't really good on my part, but the very, very creative thinking from the EDTEC group about the big picture of reform and how technology weaves through it and they don't have a lot of money. They had 650 million dollars in their program and it's out competing in the states in the districts, but I was simply blown away by that group of people. For those of you who may be like dah, they're next door and we talk to them all the time, but don't forget about these fabulous people in your states and some really good ideas. Just because they have a little bit of money doesn't mean they don't have big ideas and really, really impressive group of people. Ready for a break? Is this a good break time? It feels like it's a good time for a little break. But just a preview of what's to come after our break. Along the lines of where we just were getting, Zollie and I will take a few different aspects of this, but the bigger connections to other monies and then some very specific ideas for the planning around this to try to help make it less overwhelming. That's what we'll be focusing on after the break.

Questions and Answers Continued

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Barb: The PowerPoint and all the information will be available after the forum. We'll get that out to you all. So you don't have to write frantically.

Maura: Please don't worry. I apologize, in our silo-ing it's not always the perfect process and it was partly my fault as the bringing together of all of this, but there were some last minute tweaks to the presentation so we just weren't prepared to have it passed out to you. But it will be available. You'll all have it. We just had to do a few refinements before pulling it up today. But absolutely, don't worry, you will get this.

