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Christopher D. Cerf  
Commissioner of Education

October 3, 2013

The Honorable Arne Duncan  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Education  
400 Maryland Avenue, SW.  
Washington, DC 20202-4260

Dear Secretary Duncan:

On behalf of Newark Public Schools (NPS), I would like to thank you for the opportunity to submit an application to the United States Department of Education's Race to the Top District (RTT-D) competition. We are proud of the track record of success we have demonstrated since our application last year and are excited about the innovative ideas that we propose.

Community buy-in and engagement is critical to the successful implementation of RTT-D and we took our responsibility to engage critical stakeholders very seriously. A multitude of partners weighed in and endorsed our efforts this year as well as last – from the Mayor to faith-based leaders to the School Advisory Board Chair to community-based advocates. Everyone in the community was and remains excited about the overall vision (which has not changed); the spirit of the feedback and suggestions were refinements that have been incorporated into this draft. However, despite similar outreach and similar content, we are unable at this time to secure a signature from the Newark Teachers Union (NTU) President, Mr. Joe Del Grosso.

Last year, the RTT-D application demonstrated a spirit of partnership between the NTU and NPS and served as a sign of hope and progress. We had hoped to continue that momentum and relentlessly reached out to discuss the application, gain the NTU's perspective, and discuss a unified strategy to ensure our application yielded positive results. We are surprised and disappointed that our attempts at engagement and dialogue have been unanswered.

The intention of this letter is to demonstrate our on-going and repeated attempts to engage the NTU and Mr. Joe Del Grosso in this process. We hope this will be taken into consideration as you and your reviewers evaluate our proposal. Furthermore, we hope you will consider accepting last year's endorsement from the NTU for this current year's application.

## Correspondence between NTU/NPS on Consultation Meetings

- NPS Calendared for 3/26/13 -- 11:00am to 12:30pm  
That day: Superintendent's office received an email from the NTU cancelling the meeting.
- NPS Calendared for 4/23/13 -- 11:00am to 12:30pm  
That day: Superintendent's office received an email from NPS staff stating they spoke to NTU staff who cancelled the meeting.
- NPS Calendared for 6/25/13 -- 11:00am to 12:30pm  
That day: Superintendent's office received an email from NTU stating the meeting was cancelled; "Joe said it isn't necessary."
- NPS Calendared for 8/27/13 -- 11:00am to 12:30pm  
That day: Superintendent's office received an email from NPS staff stating they spoke to the NTU staff who cancelled the meeting.
- NPS Calendared for 9/24/13 -- 11:00am to 12:30pm  
NTU staff called the office on 9/20/13 and spoke to staff in the Superintendent's office to cancel the meeting.

## Individual outreach to President Del Grosso

- 11/06/12 - NTU signs last year's RTT-D application (approximately 80% of which is the same content, with refinements based on reviewer feedback)
- 12/11/12 - After being rejected for RTT-D, the Superintendent begins leading several sessions to ensure Newark learns from the feedback and expresses intent to reapply if there is an opportunity; stakeholders remain enthusiastic. No concerns are raised by the NTU.
- Around 8/15/13 - RTT-D guidelines are posted; NPS begins process of identifying resources to respond
- Around 8/20/13 - NPS decides to apply for RTT-D
- 8/24/13 - Superintendent makes a personal request to meet with Mr. Del Grosso. He indicates interest but repeated attempts to secure a date are unsuccessful.
- 9/6/13 - Superintendent makes another personal appeal for an in-person meeting. He indicates interest but repeated attempts to secure a date are again unsuccessful.
- 9/17/13 - Presentation is made at the School Advisory Board business meeting.
- 9/21/13 - Superintendent makes a stronger personal appeal for an in-person meeting. He indicates he will instruct his office to find time.
- 9/24/13 - Presentation is made at the School Advisory Board public (and televised) meeting.
- Realizing the RTT-D deadline is fast approaching (and with no date for a personal discussion secured), Superintendent asks Ruben Roberts, Director of Community Relations, to reach out specifically on RTT-D while she attempts to secure time with between her and Mr. Del Grosso.
- 9/24/13 - Mr. Roberts calls the NTU to schedule time with Mr. Del Grosso. He leaves a message. His call is not returned.
- 9/25/13 - NTU staff offer time to the Superintendent for Wednesday, October 2<sup>nd</sup> at 3:00pm. (This was subsequently cancelled by the NTU on Wednesday, October 2<sup>nd</sup>

at 3:05pm). Knowing this is after the RTT-D deadline, Mr. Roberts continues his outreach.

- 9/26/13 – Mr. Roberts calls the NTU, there is no answer.
- 9/30/13 – Mr. Roberts tries an alternate number, there is no answer. He tries texting as well.
- 9/30/13 – The NTU responds and Mr. Roberts and NTU staff agree on a plan: NPS will messenger a hard copy and meet on 10/1 to discuss.
- 10/1/13 -- Hard copy is messengered with a plan to meet at 1PM. At 12:45 this meeting is cancelled. NTU suggests meeting first thing in the morning to further discuss. NPS agrees. At no time since last year's submission or during the outreach were any concerns raised. NPS assumed NTU, like many others in the community, knew the content and would offer minor adjustments as necessary.
- 10/2/13 –
  - Mr. Roberts calls first thing in the morning as planned and receives no response.
  - Midday, NTU staff suggest the Superintendent should call Mr. Del Grosso.
  - The Superintendent made several attempts – via two different numbers – to reach Mr. Del Grosso to no avail.
  - Midday an email comes from the NTU stating they will not sign as a result of “lack of consultation;” after being reminded of the attempts summarized here, NTU sends a list of concerns.
  - NPS responds within the hour – most concerns were addressed; the response: we are still not signing.

Given our fiscal challenges, the need for additional family and student supports, and the overt digital divide that exists, we have been pursuing this opportunity with enthusiasm for a year and a half. Our children, our families, our staff, and our community need and deserve this funding – and I believe the NTU leadership team, though not offering its signature to this application, fundamentally cares about that too.

It is our humble request that you will accept last year's letter of support and signature in lieu of a signature for this year. It is also important that you understand our track record of collaborating with the NTU having signed a landmark agreement last year and our intention, despite this temporary setback, to continue working with them.

Respectfully submitted,

Cami Anderson  
State District Superintendent, Newark Public Schools

Cc: Christopher Cerf, Commissioner of Education, State of New Jersey