



MEMORANDUM

DATE: April 25, 2011

TO: Joshua Brammer
Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs
Office of Management and Budget (OMB)

THROUGH: Tomakie Washington
Information Collection Coordinator
Regulatory Information Management Services
U.S. Department of Education

APR 26 2011

FROM: Margo Anderson *Margo Anderson*
Associate Assistant Deputy Secretary

SUBJECT: DC School Choice Incentive Program – Request for Emergency Clearance

This is a request for emergency clearance to collect basic, time critical information about scholarship applicants for the DC School Choice Incentive Program, and preliminary information for the evaluation. The Program was recently reauthorized on April 15, 2011 through "District of Columbia, Federal Funds, Federal Payment for School Improvement". Speaker Boehner introduced the Scholarships for Opportunity and Results (SOAR) Act which reauthorized the DC School Choice Incentive Program for another five years beginning in FY 2011. Pursuant to 5 CFR 1320.13, the Department requests that OMB review the DC School Choice Incentive data collection tool under its emergency procedures. The request for an emergency clearance is twofold: (1) public harm is likely to result as more than 1,150 students on the current waiting list must be selected and approved to receive funding by the end of June, a process that requires approximately eight weeks to complete; and (2) receiving funding was an unanticipated event as funding for this program was previously discontinued.

The purpose of the DC School Choice Incentive Program (Program) is to provide low-income parents residing in the District of Columbia with expanded options for the education of their children. The statute for this Program requires scholarships to be awarded to students who reside in the District of Columbia and come from households whose incomes do not exceed 185% of the poverty line. Priority is given to students who are currently attending Title I schools in need of improvement, corrective action or restructuring as defined by Title I. To assist in the student selection and assignment process, the information to be collected as requested under this emergency clearance will be used to determine the eligibility of those students who are interested in the available scholarships. Also, the authorizing statute requires the mandated evaluation to address

changes in parents' school involvement and satisfaction and so initial levels of those factors need to be assessed at the time of application.

Failure to collect this information in a timely manner will hinder the grantee's ability to:

- 1) Administer scholarships (approximately \$15 million) for this fiscal year as required by the statute;
- 2) Perform outreach into low income communities to make them aware that new scholarships are available;
- 3) Collect and process scholarship applications to determine eligibility;
- 4) Administer the student lottery;
- 5) Sign-up schools to participate in the program and verify they meet legislatively mandated requirements;
- 6) Identify the number of slots by grade available in participating schools;
- 7) Collect and disseminate information on participating schools to facilitate parents' school search process;
- 8) Facilitate parents' application process to schools and enroll their child(ren);
- 9) Place students in school through a student/school match process;
- 10) Update scholarship invoicing and payments system to accommodate new legislatively identified scholarship caps and published tuition and fees;
- 9) Effectively manage the distribution of scholarships to low-income parents of students; and,
- 6) Meet certain evaluation and reporting requirements, as required by the statute.

In turn, this will negatively impact the entire program by risking fair and equitable access to the expanded educational options for low-income parents in the District of Columbia by:

1. Significantly reducing awareness of available scholarships among eligible low-income students and families.

The challenges associated with communicating about a new program or new opportunity to low-income families is well-documented. This, in combination with large amounts of misinformation surrounding the OSP in low-income communities – due largely to a wide range of public media coverage and hearsay – will require effective and comprehensive outreach.

2. Threatening the integrity of eligibility determination.

Eligibility determination for new applicants has historically averaged 60 days per application. Since 2009-2010, the last year applications were collected, the process has been streamlined. Even with these improved processes in place, eligibility determination will be extremely challenging. There will be only 25 days to collect and process applications before the scholarship lottery on June 15, 2011. In addition to residency and income eligibility, new applicants must provide documentation of the students current school (SINI school priority), and age (in the case of Kindergarteners).

3. *Threatening the ability to design a robust lottery program to reflect legislative scholarship award priorities.*

Multi-tiered priorities added to the reauthorization promise to improve and support families' educational outcomes. The crossover among priorities, i.e. an OSP sibling who is in a SINI school versus an OSP sibling who is not, will require a more robust lottery design than in earlier years. Comprehensive background information is needed to ensure that applicants in the various priority groups are appropriately designated.

In addition, data on available slots by grade by school must be collected in order to program the lottery. Once completed, scholarship recipients and non-recipients will need to be contacted.

4. *Reducing parents decision to make an informed choice by:*

The legislative intent to provide parents with more options will be seriously eroded if the administrator cannot sign up participating schools, collect and disseminate data/information about the schools to parents, and provide parents sufficient time to learn about and visit participating schools.

Families will have only 10 school days after the lottery to apply and be accepted at a participating school, making a school fair critical to expedite the process.

In addition, significantly fewer seats will be available to OSP students. Schools will not enroll an OSP student who has not been deemed eligible in order to maintain their own fiscal integrity. Therefore, since schools hire their teaching staff and purchase supplies based on the enrollment at the end of June (when schools close for the summer) schools will not be sufficiently staffed to accommodate additional OSP students when they open for the school year beginning August 15, 2011.

5. *Negatively impacting the fiscal integrity of scholarship invoicing.*

Once schools have closed for the summer, the administrator will need to create/upgrade its Parent School Invoicing software/system to incorporate legislative changes and new requirements. These systems will need to be put in place and tested to enable the first scholarship payment which takes place in late September.

Timeline/Critical Path

OSP Participating private schools will begin the 2011-2012 school year starting August 15, 2011. Approval of emergency clearance by May 5, 2011 will leave at most only 14 weeks in which to launch a newly reauthorized program. See the attached timeline.

Schools are closed in July and August for the summer, requiring that the majority of outreach, application collection and processing, eligibility determination, the lottery, school solicitation and information collection, parent research of schools and student application, and student slot placement **to be completed no later than June 30, 2011 – reducing the time to effectively implement the program for 2011 to 8 weeks.**

Due to the urgency associated with distributing the scholarship form and collecting information from interested participants, we are requesting an emergency clearance by Thursday, May 5. Please note that the prior clearance for this program expired earlier this year and was not renewed because in FY 2009, language was passed in an omnibus spending bill prohibiting any new students from receiving scholarships unless the program was fully reauthorized by Congress.

ED is requesting OMB approval by May 5, 2011.

Thank you for your prompt consideration of my request. If you have questions, please contact Margo Anderson at (202) 205-3010 or margo.anderson@ed.gov.