



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION
OFFICE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION AND REHABILITATIVE SERVICES

DEC 29, 2014

Dear State Directors:

State and local educational leaders are often confronted with difficult decisions regarding the best use of their limited resources to meet the educational needs of all students. We also recognize that State educational agencies (SEAs), local educational agencies (LEAs), and schools are interested in leveraging non-Federal and Federal funds as efficiently and effectively as possible to sustain reform efforts and ensure that all students can be successful.

To support these efforts, the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education and Office of Special Education Programs have undertaken a series of activities focused on identifying opportunities to leverage Federal funds to best support improved outcomes for all students. These efforts are designed to identify ways that SEAs and LEAs are currently effectively leveraging their Federal funds, including funds provided under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and under Part A of Titles I, II, and III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended (ESEA). In addition, we sought to learn if and how Federal fiscal requirements limit the ability of SEAs and LEAs to provide services for students, including students with disabilities, those who are disadvantaged, and English learners. We continue to be particularly interested in learning what steps the U.S. Department of Education (Department) can take to better support SEAs and LEAs in sustaining critical educational reforms and leveraging their resources effectively.

As part of this effort, we convened a focus group of experts to participate in a process designed to identify ways to move the field from the current state to the preferred state of practice in leveraging funding to support all students. The focus group included State and local practitioners, including audit and business officials, as well as representatives from the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Association of State Directors of Special Education. The enclosed document, "*Leveraging Federal Funding Focus Group Proceedings*," includes an overview of the process and identifies the focus group's recommendations to the Department. The recommendations include short term actions for the Department to consider relating to technical assistance, updating regulations, and information clarification and

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The Department of Education's mission is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access.

dissemination. The focus group recommended that, in the long term, the Department focus on ways to reduce burden on student data reporting, without compromising accountability. The focus group's specific short-term and long-term recommendations are outlined on pages 5-7 of the report.

We are committed to implementing many of the ideas included in this report – particularly those that involve partnering with our stakeholders to ensure that guidance is readily available to support SEAs and LEAs in taking advantage of the existing flexibilities in using Federal funds. Initially we will be developing some technical assistance tools that will support SEAs and LEAs in maximizing existing flexibilities to leverage Federal funds. We will continue to engage with State and local leaders and those working in educational organizations to help us move this work forward.

We greatly appreciate the contributions of the experts that participated in the focus group proceedings and look forward to expanding the conversation to include your thoughts and ideas.

We hope that the enclosed report is useful to you, your staff, and LEAs and schools in your State. If there are any questions, please let us know.

Sincerely,

/s/

Monique M. Chism, Ph.D.
Director
Office of State Support

/s/

Ruth E. Ryder
Deputy Director
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Enclosure