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Dr. Gail M. Morrison  
Interim Executive Director

June 7, 2007

**MEMORANDUM**

**To:** Dr. Layton R. McCurdy, Chairman, and Members, Commission on Higher Education

**From:** Dr. Bettie Rose Horne, Chair, and Members, Committee on Academic Affairs and Licensing *BRH/ML*

**Informational Report on Centers of Excellence (Teacher Education)**  
**New Center, FY 2007-08**  
**Funding Allocation to Existing Centers, FY 2007-08**

**Background**

Requests for Proposals for Centers of Excellence for the FY 2007-08 project year were issued to all eligible public and private institutions in September 1, 2006. A Center must focus on the development and modeling of state-of-the-art teacher training programs (in-service and pre-service) at the host institution as well as serve as a catalyst for changing teacher training programs at other institutions of higher education which prepare and support teachers. Centers should enhance the institution's professional development programs as an integral part of its mission and focus services on low-performing schools as identified under the Education Accountability Act's annual report cards for 2004. Target schools and districts are those that have an EAA absolute rating of average and a poverty index of > 25%. At the request of the Education Oversight Committee, proposals were requested that focus on the four content areas (math, science, social studies, English/Language Arts) for middle level education. Four proposals were received for consideration:

- ❖ Claflin University  
Center of Excellence on Middle Level Education

- ❖ Coastal Carolina University  
Center of Excellence for Closing the Achievement Gap
- ❖ University of South Carolina - Aiken  
Center of Excellence in Middle-level Interdisciplinary Strategies for Teaching (CE-MIST)
- ❖ University of South Carolina - Columbia  
Center for Excellence in the Advancement of Young Adolescent Learning

A Review Panel consisting of two representatives from current Centers of Excellence, one representative from the Department of Education, one representative from the Middle Level Teacher Education Initiative, one representative from the Education Oversight Committee and one staff member from the Commission on Higher Education was appointed to review the proposals and to make recommendations. The Panel was chaired by Dr. Ronald Joekel, a professor from the University of Nebraska.

### **Discussion**

The Review Panel met on March 17, 2007, to receive presentations from the representatives from each institution and discuss the merits of each proposed center. The panel's recommendation is to fund the proposed center from the University of South Carolina - Aiken. The panel members conducted a lengthy discussion about the proposals and concluded that the proposed center from USC-Aiken rated the highest in the panel's discussion. The purpose of the Center of Excellence in Middle-level Interdisciplinary Strategies for Teaching (CE-MIST) is to serve as a state-of-the-art resource center that will improve middle level education. CE-MIST will develop and model state-of-the-art teaching strategies, conduct research, disseminate information and provide training for middle level teachers and the higher education faculty that will work with them. CE-MIST will focus on working with students and teachers at three low-performing schools: A. L. Corbett Middle School, Leavelle McCampbell Middle School and Johnson Edgefield Trenton Middle School.

**The amount of the award for the first year for a new center is:**

- **University of South Carolina – Aiken                      \$150,000**

The proposed centers from Claflin University, Coastal Carolina University, and USC-Columbia had salient features and potential, but the panel was charged with selecting one proposal they felt had the most promise to fulfill the purpose of the Center of Excellence Program Guidelines and improving the content knowledge of middle level students. In FY 2006-07, the S.C. General Assembly approved the Commission's request for an appropriation of \$721,101. With five centers in the second, third, and fourth years of funding, funding is available for only one new Center for FY 2007-08, contingent

upon the availability of funds and the approval from the General Assembly for an additional Center.

The proposed center from USC-Columbia, a Center of Excellence in the Advancement of Young Adolescent Learning, was strongly considered for funding. The purpose of the center was to create and sustain a model of school reform in two low performing schools: one rural and one in the metropolitan Columbia area that would focus on building student-teacher relationships, raising expectations, and extending teacher knowledge. The proposal appeared to focus on a small number of teachers at the schools and lacked a specific quantitative evaluation. The review panel expressed concern about the institutional commitment to the project and suggested that the first year of the project be implemented prior to resubmitting the project for future funding possibilities through this program.

The proposed Center of Excellence on Middle Level Education from Claflin University also was evaluated as having strong potential for funding. The Center's purpose is to improve student achievement at the middle level. The Center would offer professional development courses and graduate coursework for in-service teachers, academic support services to middle level students and character education and career exploration to middle level students in Orangeburg 3, Orangeburg 4, Orangeburg 5, and Calhoun County School District. The panel was impressed with the Saturday Academies for middle school students and appreciated the school districts that would be involved in the project. The panel voiced concerns about the budget and suggested that Claflin work with CHE staff prior to submitting future proposals. The panel would like to have seen more evidence on commitment from the institution and the school districts as there were no members from the school districts or the institution present at the meeting.

A Center of Excellence for Closing the Achievement Gap was proposed by Coastal Carolina University. The primary purpose of the Center was to raise the academic achievement of middle school students in high poverty schools by increasing the quality and quantity of Middle School teachers through a state-of-the-art, clinically based pre-service and in-service program. The panel felt the proposal did not focus on the content in middle schools, but more on the achievement gap. Goals and objectives were not specific to middle schools and it was difficult to get a sense of the project other than in broad generalities. A concern was expressed that the proposal was focused on current goals of the university and not on building a "new" program/center. The panel would like to have seen more evidence on commitment from the institution and the school districts as there were no members from the school districts or the institution present at the meeting.

These project proposals have been referred to the Commission's *Improving Teacher Quality Competitive Grants Program*. The institutions proposing these projects

have been urged either to adapt their proposals to the requirements of that program, and submit them for funding, or to revise the proposals and resubmit to next year's Center of Excellence (Education) competition.

**In keeping with authority previously delegated to it by the Commission, on April 5, 2007, the Committee on Academic Affairs and Licensing accepted the Review Panel's recommendation and approved an award to the University of South Carolina - Aiken to establish the Center of Excellence in Middle-level Interdisciplinary Strategies for Teaching (CE-MIST) in the amount of \$150,000, pending submission of 1) a revised assessment that focuses on student outcomes; 2) the inclusion of an external evaluator; 3) a description of activities that include elements of highly effective middle schools; 4) a revised budget that includes an external evaluator and justification for staff salaries and availability of funds from the General Assembly.**

**The Committee on Academic Affairs and Licensing approved the continued funding for Clemson University (\$112,500), College of Charleston (\$135,000), Francis Marion University (\$112,500), University of South Carolina - Columbia (\$112,500), University of South Carolina - Beaufort (\$100,175), and University of South Carolina - Aiken (\$112,500), pending submission of a formal budget request for FY 2007-08 and a final report for FY 2006-07.**

This report is being presented to the Commission for information only.