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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
23 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, ME 04333-0023

ROBERT G. HASSON, JR., Ed.D.
COMMISSIONER

December 15, 2017

«Contact_Name»
«Main_Applicant_Contact_Info»
«Address»
«City», «State» 0«Zip»

RE: «Proposed_Name», Application Part I

Dear Regional Service Center Main Applicant,

Thank you for your commitment to delivering exceptional public education to Maine students. I recognize that the time and energy that you have put into your application represents your deep commitment to ensuring that every student in Maine has access to the best possible public education. I am pleased to thank you for your vision and your leadership.

Please share this letter with the membership of the proposed center, as the Department has only contacted the main applicant of each proposed center. This communication is intended to provide guidance for the road ahead and answer several questions that you may have. In addition, in section VI. there is specific feedback for your Part I Application that shares the Department's determination as to whether your application has met the minimum criteria to be considered as a regional service center for the 2018-19 school year, and, when appropriate, specific suggestions for modifications or improvements to your proposal, either for the Part II Application or continued development for subsequent years.

Please take the time to read the information in this document carefully as it will inform your next steps. I value the opportunity to work with you in this endeavor.

Sincerely,

Robert G. Hasson, Jr.
Commissioner of Education

I. Overview

As you may have heard, the Department received 23 Part I Applications proposing regional service centers involving 104 distinct school administrative units (SAUs). While this marks only a first step in a multi-year journey to establish robust regional service centers, it is an important step, and represents many hours of hard work, thoughtful conversations, and a willingness by local leaders to imagine the possibilities we might unlock by working together. Neither I nor my colleagues at the Maine Department of Education take this for granted, and we acknowledge the many emotions that accompany an undertaking of this nature. The emotions that I wish to convey today are gratitude, encouragement, and hope.

Over the last several weeks, we have asked you to be innovative and to look for opportunities where there is shared need and mutual benefit. Many of the Part I Applications reflect exactly that approach, and the Department endeavors to meet you with enthusiasm and flexibility in helping you realize your visions and potentially expand upon them. Our collective challenge is to remain focused on an enduring, long-term vision and to view these partnerships through that lens.

In meeting this challenge, we must acknowledge that not every application has met the minimum threshold to move forward toward the successful creation of a regional service center by July 2018. By informing some districts of the Department's determination, we do not wish to foreclose the possibility that a regional effort will be successful in subsequent years, and would encourage that the work continue in those districts. There may be other resources that enable these projects to move forward with the proposed efforts (including applying for a Fund for the Efficient Delivery of Educational Services (FEDES) grant).

II. Determination of geographic areas for the centers

I am charged by statute to "determine 9 to 12 geographic areas for the establishment of each school management and leadership center." Initially, it is my intention to establish geographic areas that reflect the regional collaboration already taking place among school districts so that we may build upon existing relationships and regional efforts.

My decision is to affirm and build upon the nine superintendent association regions that already exist within the Maine School Management Association. In the coming weeks, before finalizing this determination, I will seek feedback as to whether any of the existing regions believe that a subdivision within the region may make sense, such as in Aroostook county where there is a large geography. I also intend to establish one

additional region that is a statewide, at-large region, which may be populated by districts that are not geographically contiguous or proximate.

Initial determination, pending further action:

1. AROOSTOOK COUNTY (potential to subdivide further)
2. PENQUIS
3. WASHINGTON COUNTY
4. HANCOCK COUNTY
5. MID-COAST
6. WESTERN MAINE
7. CUMBERLAND COUNTY
8. KENNEBEC VALLEY
9. YORK COUNTY
10. STATEWIDE, at-large

While these geographic areas provide the outline of the regional partnerships, membership in a regional service center does not, under statute, require the member to be physically located in the area's geographic boundary.

Furthermore, within each geographic area, it is my determination that more than one regional service center may be formed. Such formation should be guided by a desire to create long-term, enduring partnerships, and to avoid creating redundant services within the same geographic area.

III. State funding for members and the regional service center

There have been many questions about the funding available from the Department, as there are multiple provisions in statute that pertain to the funding that school units pursuing a regional service center shall be eligible to receive. Some of these provisions in statute are potentially duplicative or contradictory, so the Department offers the following guidance for the 2018-2019 school year.

20-A M.R.S. §15683-C directs the Commissioner to establish a per-pupil allocation for school administrative units that purchase at least two different services covering a total of at least two different categories from the regional center, and directs that the state contribution for each SAU be multiplied by the SAU's state share percentage (with a minimum of 30% to ensure availability of subsidy for low subsidy receivers). The legislature established a targeted per-pupil allocation within system administration in the amount of \$46 to SAUs that have established regional administration services pursuant to Ch. 123. Since the \$46 per-pupil rate was specifically established by the

legislature for 2018-19 funding, that amount will be used to determine the incentive funding for SAUs that are members of an approved regional service center.

State subsidy for each SAU that is a member of an approved regional service center, shall equal the \$46 rate multiplied by the number of students (10/1/2017 count) multiplied by the SAU's 2018-19 State share percentage but not lower than 30%.

For every SAU that is a member of a proposal that is cleared to proceed to the Part II Application, the funding amounts will be reflected as an adjustment on the preliminary ED 279 when they are released to all SAUs in early 2018. The funding will become available to the SAU once the regional service center has been formed through the ratification of an interlocal agreement by the member SAUs.

A regional service center shall also receive direct state funding for 55 percent of the executive director's salary and benefits, 100 percent of an accounting and payroll system, and 100 percent of a student information system as long as the center provides to members at least two different services from at least two different categories. The Department will likely need to collect additional information from each applicant regarding these provisions in advance of the Part II Application deadline to determine the amounts that each regional service center, if approved and established, will receive.

IV. Guidance for Part II Application

The Department has provided each applicant with specific feedback on the Part I Application in section VI. If applicable, we encourage the applicant to address that feedback in the Part II Application which is due by April 15, 2018.

The Department is currently reviewing the Part II Application to determine whether any additional detail will be requested and will issue guidance no later than January 5.

Although the deadline to submit a Part II Application is April 15, SAUs may submit the application for review and Department approval as soon as the application is ready. The Department will review applications on a rolling basis and provide feedback in a timely manner so that SAUs may proceed with the necessary steps to complete and ratify interlocal agreements.

If there are additional SAUs that were not listed as members during the Part I Application but wish to join a proposed Part II Application, that is permissible, upon the agreement of the original members – and providing that the interlocal agreement framework allows for additional members to join. Such new members will remain

eligible for the funding as described above, however the adjustment will not appear on the preliminary ED 279, and will be calculated after the Part II deadline.

V. Contingency plan for proposals that fail to ratify interlocal agreements

The Department remains committed to the goal that initial regional service centers are operational by July 1, 2018, and encourages all applicants to pursue this timeframe.

In the event that there are applicants with member SAUs that are unable to ratify interlocal agreements in time for July 1, the Department will consider on a case by case basis whether it makes sense to hold the regional center subsidy for a reasonable amount of time to allow local school communities to reach agreement. In such an instance, the Department will proceed as follows:

- The subsidy adjustment calculated for each participating SAU on the ED 279 will be held by the Department, pending the negotiation of an agreement between the Department and each SAU.
- In the agreement, the member SAUs will outline the steps that will be taken during the 2018-2019 fiscal year to finalize the regional service center, and laying out milestones that the member SAUs commit to meeting by certain dates to keep the progress on track.
- In the event that the milestones are met and ratification of the regional service center occurs by the deadline established in the agreement, the DOE shall make the entire subsidy adjustment available to each member SAU that joins the proposed regional service center and agrees to purchase at least two services from at least two distinct categories.

VI. Review of Regional Service Center Part I Application and Department feedback

Proposed Regional Service Center Name: **«Proposed Name»**

Please verify the following list of SAUs from your application that are applying to form the regional service center. If there are errors or omissions, contact Jennifer Pooler at Jennifer.g.pooler@maine.gov by December 20, 2017 with the correct information.

«Identify the school administrative units»

Minimum required elements	Yes/No
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1. The regional service center proposes developing, managing, and providing services or programs with 2 (two) or more members. [20-A MRSA, Chapter 123, §3801(1)(B)]	«M_1»
2. The proposed regional service center offers at least 2 (two) different services under at least 2 (two) different categories for funding purposes. [20-A MRSA, Chapter 123, §3806 and §15683-C]	«M_2»
Additional analysis	Yes/No
3. The regional service center proposes that the programs and/or services will be operational by July 1, 2018?	«M_3»
4. The proposed regional service center is distinct in membership from another proposed regional service center.	«M_4»
5. The proposed regional service center is distinct in programs and/or services from another proposed regional service center located in close geographic proximity.	«M_5»

DETERMINATION

The Department has reviewed the Part I Application and has determined that it «has has not» met the minimum criteria of a Regional Service Center as established by 20-A MRS, Chapter 123 and the applicants are «cleared not cleared» to proceed to a Part II Application. «on_track»

Please consider these specific suggestions for modifications or improvements to your proposal, either for the Part II Application or continued development for subsequent years.

- «Comment_1»
- «Comment_2»
- «Comment_3»
- «Comment_4»