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GSP Awarded Contract to Support Major Federal Grant Program

A Partnership of Three Organizations Will Provide Technical Assistance to Grantees in the Smaller Learning Communities Program

CONTACT

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PORTLAND, ME: The Great Schools Partnership was selected by the Academy for Education Development to be one of two primary technical-assistance subcontractors, along with the Center for Secondary School Redesign, for the U.S. Department of Education's Smaller Learning Communities Program. The three organizations will collaboratively develop a series of events, professional development opportunities, and products for the 214 project directors and more than 600 high schools currently involved in the federal program. The products will include guides and tools designed to help schools develop effective goals and objectives for systemic reform, strengthen ninth-grade transitions, design and execute high-quality schools visits, and increase postsecondary aspirations and preparation for all students. The three organizations will also coordinate major conferences for districts and schools, create a series of professional development webinars, and launch a new website that will function as a comprehensive resource for educators and high-school communities engaged in systemic school improvement. The contract also entails a qualitative and quantitative evaluation of selected sites to examine promising ninth-grade transition strategies, as well as site visits to schools throughout the country to identify and investigate promising practices in all areas of high school reform.

The Academy for Education Development cited the Partnership's strong expertise in developing practical, effective tools for educators, its strong track record coaching schools engaged in systemic school improvement, its demonstrated commitment to the core values of the federal program, and its extensive experience coordinating complex grant initiatives—including a Smaller Learning Communities Program grant awarded to five large, comprehensive high schools in Maine—as the primary reasons why it selected the organization.

The Smaller Learning Communities Program awards discretionary grants to local educational agencies to support the implementation of smaller learning communities and other activities focused on improving student academic achievement in large public high schools with enrollments of 1,000 or more students. Smaller learning communities is a broad term encompassing a variety of structures and strategies intended to increase instructional personalization, student engagement, and learning outcomes—such as freshman academies, multi-grade academies organized around career interests or other themes, “houses” in which small groups of students remain together throughout high school, and autonomous schools-within-a-school. The program also supports a variety of personalization strategies, including differentiated instructional practices, student-designed projects and conferences, student advisories, family-advocate systems, and mentoring programs, among others.

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The Office of Elementary and Secondary Education awards Smaller Learning Communities awards for up to 60 months to local educational agencies (districts and schools). The original grants were awarded in 2001, and the program is authorized under Title V, Part D, Subpart 4 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) (20 U.S.C. 7249), as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

In 2007, the U.S. Department of Education reassessed the program (based on emerging research indicating that smaller learning community strategies, in exclusion of other systemic reforms, do not lead to significant improvements in student achievement) and established a new guiding priority for the Smaller Learning Communities grants: preparing all students to succeed in postsecondary education and careers without need for remediation. This new directive expanded the objectives of program, shifting the focus from structure-specific redesign models to goal-driven systemic reform strategies.

The Smaller Learning Communities Program's current grantees are engaged in implementing a variety of school-improvement strategies, including such activities as:

- Providing intensive interventions to students who enter high school with reading or mathematics skills that are below grade level that are designed to help students attain proficiency by the end of tenth grade.
- Enrolling students in a coherent sequence of core academic courses that will equip them with the skills and content knowledge needed to succeed in college.
- Offering tutoring, academic interventions, and student and parent guidance on selecting a high school program of study that will impart the academic and skill preparation needed to succeed in a postsecondary-degree program.
- Increasing opportunities for students to earn postsecondary credit during high school through Advanced Placement courses, International Baccalaureate courses, or dual-credit programs.
- Provide teachers with professional development, coaching, mentoring, regular opportunities for collaboration with colleagues, and other supports needed to implement a rigorous college-preparatory curriculum and provide high-quality instruction to every student.

Great Schools Partnership

The Great Schools Partnership is a nonprofit school-support organization committed to redesigning public education and improving the quality of learning for all students. The Partnership provides school coaching, professional development, and technical assistance to educators, schools, districts, and state agencies, while also developing cutting-edge tools and coordinating the implementation of major public and private grants.

www.greatschoolspartnership.org

Academy for Education Development

AED is a nonprofit organization working globally to improve education, health, civil society, and economic development—the foundation of thriving societies. In collaboration with local and national partners, AED fosters sustainable results through practical, comprehensive approaches to social and economic challenges. AED implements more than 250 programs serving people in all 50 U.S. states and more than 150 countries.

www.aed.org

Center for Secondary School Redesign

The Center for Secondary School Redesign seeks to personalize learning for all youth and catalyzing the transformation of academic and 21st-century learning, knowledge, and skills; social/emotional growth; civic responsibility; and postsecondary learning and life preparedness for all students. CSSR engages schools and districts to implement best practices, including embedding change leadership processes in the fabric of school-reform initiatives.

www.cssr.us