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TO: Priority Schools and Respective LEAs

FROM: Mike Koprowski, Special Assistant for Accountability

SUBJECT: Signing and Retention Bonuses for Level 5 Teachers

The Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) is pleased to offer a new package of financial incentives to help *attract* the most effective teachers to Priority Schools and to help *retain* the most effective teachers in Priority Schools. Starting now, the state is offering to provide funds to LEAs to pay signing bonuses for every new Level 5 teacher that is brought into a Priority School. Additionally, the state is offering to provide funds to LEAs to pay retention bonuses for every existing Level 5 teacher that decides to stay at that Priority School for another year. The signing bonuses will be set at \$7,000 per Level 5 teacher. The retention bonuses will be set at \$5,000 per Level 5 teacher. Both the signing and retention bonuses will be funded with School Improvement 1003(a) funds.

Research demonstrates that teacher effectiveness is the most important school-based factor affecting student achievement. With that in mind, one of our most important tasks is to ensure that Priority School students have access to an increasing number of Tennessee's most effective teachers. After consulting with educators in the field, including those in Memphis City Schools, Shelby County Schools, the Achievement School District, and School Improvement Grant (SIG) schools, we concluded that more powerful recruiting and retention tools are needed to accomplish this task. As such, we developed this program to provide district and school leaders with substantially more leverage in the current recruiting and retention cycle.

We hope that you are as excited about this opportunity as we are.

Which Priority Schools are Eligible?

- In order to be eligible, the school must be officially designated as a 2012-13 Priority School. See the official list [here](#).

How Do Schools Apply for this Program?

- There will not be a competitive application process for this program. We are only requiring a commitment to participate from each Priority School and its respective LEA. The TDOE will ask each eligible school and its respective LEA to sign a commitment letter (see Attachment A below). By signing this commitment letter, the eligible school and the LEA are agreeing to participate in this program and are agreeing to the terms and conditions described in this memorandum.
- The Priority School and its respective LEA will make teacher hiring decisions at the local level.

How is a Level 5 Teacher Defined?

- For a tested subject area teacher, he/she must be a Level 5 on the three-year TVAAS composite score AND a Level 5 on the overall evaluation score. If a three-year TVAAS composite is not

available, then the two-year TVAAS composite will be used. If a two-year TVAAS composite is not available, then the one-year TVAAS score will be used.

- For a non-tested subject area teacher, he/she must be a Level 5 on the overall evaluation score.

How Does the Signing Bonus Work?

- Beginning now, Priority Schools will recruit and select Level 5 teachers from non-Priority Schools. These teachers will be Level 5 according to the 2011-12 school year results.
- In the summer of 2013, TVAAS scores and overall evaluation scores will be available. If the teacher has fallen below a Level 4, he/she is no longer eligible for the signing bonus.
- If the teacher has maintained a Level 4 or 5 in the 2012-13 school year, then he/she will be paid \$2,000 at the start of the 2013-14 school year.
- In the summer of 2014, TVAAS scores and overall evaluations will be available. If the teacher has fallen below a Level 4, he/she is no longer eligible for the remaining \$5,000 of the signing bonus.
- If the teacher has maintained a Level 4 or 5 in the 2013-14 school year, then he/she will receive the remaining \$5,000 in the summer of 2014.
- Signing bonuses only apply to teachers that are new to the particular Priority School – and it must be a teacher that moves from a non-Priority School to a Priority School. If a teacher moves from one Priority School to another Priority School, he/she will not qualify for the signing bonus.

How Do Retention Bonuses Work?

- Retention bonuses are for teachers who are already serving in a Priority School.
- If the teacher has earned a Level 5 in the 2012-13 school year, and if the teacher agrees to stay at the Priority School for the 2013-14 school year, then he/she will receive a \$5,000 retention bonus at the start of the 2013-14 school year.
- If the teacher does not stay at the Priority School for the entire 2013-14 school year, he/she will be required to pay back the entire \$5,000 retention bonus. In these instances, the state will recoup funds from the LEA.

Submitting Documentation

- Later this summer, the Priority School and its respective LEA will be asked to submit documentation to the TDOE. For signing bonuses, the documentation must show that: 1) the teacher was a Level 5 at the time of hiring and has maintained a Level 4 or 5 in the 2012-13 school year; 2) the teacher is new to the Priority School in the 2013-14 school year; and 3) the teacher is coming from a non-Priority School.
- For retention bonuses, the documentation must show that: 1) the teacher is a Level 5 in the 2012-13 school year; 2) the teacher has already taught a full year at that particular Priority School; and 3) the teacher has agreed to stay for the 2013-14 school year.

To What Must the Teachers Agree?

- When accepting a signing bonus, the teacher will sign documentation agreeing to spend at least two (2) years at that Priority School – the 2013-14 school year and the 2014-15 school year.
- When accepting a retention bonus, the teacher will sign documentation agreeing to stay at that Priority School for the 2013-14 school year.