# U.S. Department of Education

March 28, 2011

Dear **District Superintendent:**

You recently received a letter about an important study being sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education. This study, ***Charting the Progress of Education Reform: An Evaluation of the Recovery Act's Role***, is part of an ongoing effort to gather information that will help us to evaluate and improve educational programs.

Please note that participation in this study is voluntary ONLY for those districts who received no funds under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). The Education Department General Administrative Regulations (34 C.F.R. § 76.591) specify that grantees are obligated to participate in department evaluations. The majority of school districts in the country received grants under the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund (SFSF) and ARRA-related supplemental Title I, IDEA, and Educational Technology grants.

We greatly appreciate your cooperation, apologize for any miscommunication concerning the voluntary nature of the study, and hope you will share the importance of responding to the study survey to school leaders in your district. We look forward to learning from your experiences with education reform and to sharing our findings with you along the way.

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, I urge you to call the Evaluation Project Director, Babette Gutmann at (888) 855-1452. Or you are welcome to call Meredith Bachman, the Department's project officer, at (202) 219-2014.

**John Easton, Director**
Institute of Education Sciences

**Alexa Posny, Assistant Secretary**
Office of Special Education & Education Rehabilitative Services

**Ann Whalen, Deputy Director**
Implementation and Support Unit

**Thelma Melendez, Assistant Secretary**
Office of Elementary & Secondary Education

Dr. Eric Holmes
Superintendent
York City SD
31 N Pershing Avenue
York, PA 17401-1927

Dear Dr. Holmes,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the U.S. Department of Education funded study, ***Charting the Progress of Education Reform: An Evaluation of the Recovery Act's Role.***

We have now selected the study sample of 3,800 schools nationwide. Listed below are the names of the schools that have been sampled from your district:

- Hannah Penn MS
- William Penn Shs

In mid-April, we will email a letter about the study to the principal at these schools along with instructions on how to access and complete the web-based survey. We realize that the district can play an important role by encouraging the selected schools to participate in the study. We would appreciate any support and encouragement that you provide. Also, if your district requires a research application, we have submitted the required application and have received approval to conduct this research from the appropriate office.

Thank you for already designating a district liaison for this evaluation. In mid-April, we will send your designated liaison information about the procedures for coordinating and completing the baseline district web-based survey.

Also enclosed is a letter from the U.S. Department of Education, being sent to all sampled districts, that provides clarification about the obligation of all districts that receive Recovery Act funding to participate in the evaluation.

We look forward to your participation in this study. Please feel free to contact me directly with questions or issues. Juanita Lucas-McLean, the evaluation's Data Collection Manager, can also assist. We both can be reached by calling 1-888-855-1452 or by emailing ARRASurvey@westat.com.

Sincerely,

Babette Gutmann

Babette Gutmann
Charting the Progress of Education Reform
Evaluation Project Director

CC: CathyAsh

Enclosure: Letter from the U.S. Department of Education

***Charting the Progress of Education Reform***

An Evaluation of the Recovery Act's Role

February 9, 2011

Dear Dr.Holmes,

I am writing to inform you that your district, York City Schools is one of the 1,700 school districts nationwide selected to participate in ***Charting the Progress of Education Reform: An Evaluation of the Recovery Act's Role***. The Institute of Education Sciences (IES) at the U.S. Department of Education (ED) has contracted with Westat and its partners, Policy Studies Associates (PSA), Chesapeake Research Associates, and the University of Wisconsin, to conduct this important study.

This study will assess how states, districts, and schools are working to improve education. The 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA or The Recovery Act) provided approximately $100 billion in additional education funding, awarded through a variety of programs. We want to understand the role that Recovery Act programs have played in reform efforts.

***Nearly every school district in the country received funds through the Recovery Act. It is ED's expectation that grantees of federal programs provide data for related national evaluations.*** Full participation from districts will allow for detailed reports that provide an accurate description of reform activity at the national level. High response rates from districts also will assure that in-depth tables can be issued. The study will also provide a unique opportunity for your state education agency (SEA), your district, and selected schools in your district to share information about any challenges faced in implementing education reform strategies.

We are contacting your SEA to inform them of the names of each school district in your state that is being asked to participate in this study. If your district requires any special research approvals, we have or will soon begin the process of completing these requirements. In the next few weeks we will inform you of the schools within your district that were selected and that we will ask to participate in this study.

Your participation in the study means that we will ask you to complete an annual web-based survey for 3 years beginning this April and again during Spring 2012 and 2013. (We also *may* ask your district to participate in a very short "pulse" poll that is part of this study.) Similarly, we will ask the principal in each of the selected schools in your district to complete an annual web-based principal survey during Spring 2011, 2012 and 2013. Both school districts and schools will have the option of completing a paper survey if they prefer.

To ensure successful district and school data collections, we need your help by designating a study liaison and encouraging the selected schools in your district to complete their surveys. Each of these activities is briefly described below:

- **Designate a study liaison:** The district survey includes a wide-range of survey topic areas that will likely require responses from more than one person. Among the topics covered are:
    - District strategies related to: educator recruitment, hiring, and induction; educator performance evaluation and compensation systems; restructuring or reorganizing schools to improve student learning; and standards, curricula, and assessments; as well as challenges encountered in each of these reform areas.
    - District reform priorities for the 2011-2012 school year, district spending of Recovery Act education funds, and revenues from the Recovery Act education programs for schools sampled for this study.

The liaison will be responsible for assigning portions of the survey to the appropriate individuals and for ensuring that all parts of the survey are completed in a timely manner.

- **Encourage the selected schools to complete their surveys beginning this spring:** After the school sample is drawn, we will contact the principals to solicit their participation. We realize that the district can play an important role by encouraging the selected schools to participate in the study. We would appreciate any support and encouragement that you provide.

Survey findings will be provided in aggregate. While findings will not identify responding districts or schools, districts can compare their own reform activities and challenges to those reported in aggregate by other similar and different districts across the nation. As explained below, all data collected for this study will be kept confidential (per The Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002), except as required by law.

Recruiter Sue Sorce from Westat will contact you in the next few days to answer any questions you may have and to ask who you have designated as the district liaison for this study. We estimate that this process will take up to 30 minutes. During this call Sue Sorce also will ask whether your district has a formal approval process that we must complete before beginning data collection. Sue Sorce can be reached by calling 1-414-550-0616 or by emailing funlovnteachers@wi.rr.com

Thank you in advance for your cooperation and participation in this important study. Feel free to contact me directly with questions or issues. Juanita Lucas-McLean, the evaluation's Data Collection Manager, can also assist. We both can be reached by calling 1-888-855-1452 or by emailing ARRASurvey@westat.com. We look forward to working with your district over the next several years to make this study a success.

Sincerely,

Babette Gutmann

Babette Gutmann
Charting the Progress of Education Reform
Evaluation Project Director

Enclosure: Charting the Progress of Education Reform

**Notice of Confidentiality**
Information collected for this study comes under the confidentiality and data protection requirements of the Institute of Education Sciences (The Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002, Title I, Part E, Section 183). Information that could identify an individual or institution will be separated from the survey responses submitted, kept in secured locations, and be destroyed as soon as they are no longer required. Survey responses will be used only for research purposes. The reports prepared for the study will summarize findings across individuals and institutions and will not associate responses with a specific district, school, or person. We will not provide information that identifies you or your district to anyone outside the study team, except as required by law.

**Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995**
According to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, no persons are required to respond to a collection of information unless such collection displays a valid OMB control number. The valid OMB control number for this information collection is 1850-0877. The approximate time required to discuss your participation in the evaluation is estimated to be 30 minutes. If you have any comments concerning the accuracy of the time estimates or suggestions for improving this form, please write to: U.S. Department of Education, Washington, DC 20202-4651.