



State of New Jersey
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
PO Box 500
TRENTON, NJ 08625-0500

JON S. CORZINE
Governor

LUCILLE E. DAVY
Commissioner

September 17, 2008

Ms. Debra S. Coughlin
Association of Mathematics Teachers of New Jersey
PO Box 7
Glassboro, NJ 08028

Re: Request for Waiver of Prohibition on Overnight Travel

Dear Ms. Coughlin:

The New Jersey Department of Education is in receipt of the application you submitted on behalf of the Association of Mathematics Teachers of New Jersey (AMTNJ) for a waiver of the prohibition on overnight travel in order to facilitate a conference on October 22-24, 2008.

As you are aware, N.J.S.A. 18A:11-12 requires that boards of education must ensure that all school district travel expenditures are "in compliance with State travel payment guidelines as established by the Department of the Treasury" On March 17, 2008, the State Department of the Treasury issued *OMB Circular 08-19* that at Section X.B specifically prohibits reimbursement for in-State overnight travel. However, the circular authorizes the Commissioner of Education "to grant waivers for overnight travel for school board members and school district employees to attend in-state conferences pursuant to guidelines issued by the Department of Education." *OMB Circular 08-19 Section I.B.8.*

On April 17, 2008, the Department issued proposed guidance on waivers for overnight travel. See Proposed Guidance on Overnight Travel (Proposed Guidance) http://www.state.nj.us/education/genfo/travel_overnight.pdf. The proposed guidance requires that in order to receive a waiver, the sponsoring organization must submit, among other things, a justification for the length of the conference and the necessity to hold events for each day beyond the second day of the conference, an explanation of the importance of the target audience attending the event, a brief report including the primary purpose of the event, key issues to be addressed and their relevance to improving instruction or the operation of a school or district, and a description of any continuing education requirements fulfilled by the conference. Proposed Guidance Section (b)(1). The guidance further states that the Commissioner may

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approve a request for a waiver “based on the strength of the application submitted considering relevance to improving instruction, school district operations or governance; relevance to the target audience; overall cost and other factors.” Proposed Guidance Section (b)(2). Finally, the guidance provides that no waivers will be granted for overnight lodging for the evening prior to the start of the conference or after check out time on the last day of the event. Proposed Guidance Section (c).

Applying these criteria to your application, the Department finds that the agenda of the proposed AMTNJ conference indicates that October 23 and October 24 contain nearly two full days of educational programming and, therefore, that AMTNJ has adequately demonstrated the need for one night of overnight lodging (October 23, 2008) in connection with the event. Furthermore, the Department finds that although the conference begins on October 22, 2008, there are less than two hours of educational programming scheduled for that day. Therefore, the Department determines that AMTNJ did not schedule the event in such a way as to minimize the number of possible nights of lodging, and will deny a waiver for overnight lodging for October 22, 2008. As a result of this limited waiver, school districts will be able to reimburse attendees for overnight lodging on October 23, 2008, provided the remaining conditions delineated in this letter are met. Reimbursement for registration fees, mileage and meals, subject to the limitations and conditions set forth in *OMB Circular 08-19* and *OMB Circular 06-14*, may also be permissible.

Please note, for purposes of attendance at this event, I am also waiving the requirement at N.J.A.C. 6A:23A-5.9(c) that school districts and county vocational districts obtain the prior written approval of the Executive County Superintendent where more than three individuals from the district are to attend or where the total cost to the district exceeds \$5,000. However, school districts should ensure that they approve attendance only of board members and employees whose duties are related to the purposes of the conference or who are required to attend to meet continuing education requirements.

Moreover, please be advised that the waiver of the prohibition for reimbursement for overnight lodging covers only those attendees whose home to event commute exceeds 50 miles. In other words, only those individuals whose one-way commute to the AMTNJ conference exceeds 50 miles may obtain reimbursement from their school district for overnight lodging.

In addition, please note that the Department recently issued revised guidance for the approval of waivers for overnight lodging to attend in-State conferences. See Revised Guidance at http://www.nj.gov/education/genfo/travel_overnight_rev.pdf. These guidelines will become effective January 1, 2009. Under the revised guidance, waivers of the overnight travel prohibition will be granted in only extremely limited circumstances, consistent with the clear Legislative intent to reduce non-instructional expenses of public school districts, particularly those related to travel. Waivers will be considered only where the sponsoring organization can demonstrate that the conference is broad and comprised of content-rich educational programming with important professional development opportunities and/or required training. In addition, the sponsoring organization must demonstrate that the conference’s content,

structure, scheduling and anticipated attendance necessitate that it be held on multiple consecutive days with overnight lodging.

Finally, I want to emphasize that I recognize the value and importance of math education and the benefits provided by the AMTNJ professional development conference. However, as I am sure you are aware, in these difficult fiscal times it is incumbent upon everyone in the education community to search for more efficient ways to deliver educational services. In the future, I encourage you and your organization to consider alternative means of providing this professional development to minimize the need for overnight stays, such as holding one day, regional events.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lucille E. Davy".

Lucille E. Davy
Commissioner of Education

LED/DA/gm/Travel_amtnj

c: Executive County Superintendents
Senior Staff