

Iowa Department of Education
(Cite as 20 D.o.E. App. Dec. 17)

In re 2001 TLCF Award Decisions	:	
Des Moines Public Schools,	:	AFFIRMATION OF
	:	GRANT DENIALS
Appellant,	:	[Adm. Doc. #4375]

On or about June 19, 2001, the Des Moines Independent School District (herein called DMPS) filed an appeal pursuant to 281 IAC 7.5 of the decision of the Technology Literacy Challenge Fund administrator to not award a TLCF grant to seven attendance centers of the district.

The TLCF grants are a federally funded initiative, authorized by 20 USC sections 6841 – 6847. State education agencies, such as the Iowa Department of Education, which have been granted these funds are to award grants to local education agencies on a competitive basis to enable the LEAs to carry out the activities described in 20 USC section 6844. That section of federal law describes six areas of activities, all of which are focused on increasing student and local community access to technology for the purpose of enhancing the instructional program.

A state education agency awarded TLCEG funds has wide discretion to implement the competitive process used by the SEA to make grants to LEAs. The Iowa Department of Education set up a process whereby a total of 150 points could be given by the team of grant readers, and an additional 60 points based on objective demographic factors, for a total of 210 points. Given the total funds to be awarded, the grant administrator determined that all applications scoring a total of 137 or more points would be funded. No applications were funded fully; all were funded at the same percentage. Of the 282 applications received, 94 received a grant.

Due to the large number of applications received, 26 teams of three readers each were formed and trained by the Department. All readers signed a pledge that they would not read a grant submitted by a district if the reader had a real or apparent conflict of interest regarding that district. Each team read and scored approximately 11-12 applications.

This appeal raises 8 points, but all of the points can be fairly located under 1 of 2 categories, (1) scoring bias or (2) consideration given to student body poverty.

1. Scoring bias

DMPS argues that Team C, which read and scored the majority of the applications submitted by DMPS, was biased, gave unduly low scores to the DMPS applications it read, didn't follow the scoring rules, was overly concerned with the commonality

demonstrated in the DMPS applications, and should not have been given so many applications from one district to read.

Team C read 11 grants. It did not award a “winning” score to any of the applicants. However, the average score given to a DMPS application by this Team was 70.6; the average score given by this Team to a non-DMPS application was 64.5.

Comparatively speaking, this team actually favored the DMPS applications.

Although the DMPS applications did not fare well with this Team, the Team clearly was very consistent on how it scored the applications it read. The spread of total Team points given by Team C was 52 points. Team B (which read the next highest amount of DMPS applications) had a spread of 92 points; Team Y (read 2 DMPS applications) had a spread of 38 points; and Team W (1 DMPS application) a spread of 106 points.

There is no indication that Team C treated the DMPS applications unfairly. It was tough on all applications it read, but consistently so. All readers signed a pledge that they would not read or score an application if they had a conflict of interest. None of the members of this Team were from AEA 11; accordingly, all applications assigned to it came from AEA 11. It is just a coincidence that, because applications were assigned by alphabetical order within an AEA, many of the DMPS buildings are close together alphabetically, resulting in Team C reading seven (of its 11) applications from DMPS.

Nor is there evidence that the Team was bothered by commonality, although we note that a team must satisfy itself that there is sufficient “ownership” by the staff, students, parents and local community of a building.

2. The poverty factor

The federal statute and regulations do not direct an SEA as to how much weight to give to poverty. The overall concept of “need” was addressed by the Iowa Department of Education through percentage of free/reduced hot lunch, present ratio of computers to students, and connectivity, with the most emphasis among these three factors going to free/reduced hot lunch. This was a straight-forward demographic awarding of points, with no bias involved.

In summary, for the foregoing reasons the Iowa Department of Education denies the appeal of DMPS.

Date

Ted Stilwill, Director

