



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY

MAY 17 2006

The Honorable Valerie Woodruff  
Secretary of Education  
Delaware Department of Education  
Townsend Building #279  
401 Federal Street, Suite 2  
Dover, Delaware 19903-1402

Dear Secretary Woodruff:

Thank you for submitting a proposal for the U.S. Department of Education's (Department) growth-based accountability model pilot project. I realize that our timelines were tight and sometimes inconvenient; I appreciate the work you and your staff have done to participate in this effort so far. The Department continues to believe that this pilot project can help determine whether growth models will, most importantly, provide a fair, reliable, and innovative mechanism for holding schools accountable for ensuring that all students reach grade-level standards in reading and mathematics by 2013-14.

As you know, the Department determined that the Delaware growth model proposal seemed poised to meet the seven core principles outlined by Secretary Spellings in her letter on November 21, 2005. As such, Delaware's proposal was forwarded to a group of peer reviewers who met on April 17-18, 2006. The range of changes and the number of conditions that the peer reviewers indicated would be required for Delaware's model to be acceptable would be tantamount to writing a new proposal. On that basis, the Department is not approving the Delaware proposal. To explain our decision, in addition to the information in this letter, I am providing two pieces of information: 1) the peer report for Delaware; and 2) a document produced by the peer review team that outlines several general themes and cross-cutting concerns raised during the peer review, although not necessarily specific to Delaware's proposal. My staff and I are willing to discuss this information with you to help refine Delaware's proposal.

The peers identified several strengths in the Delaware proposal: the model is standards-based in that it focuses on movement across achievement levels and it specifically includes students with disabilities. However, the peers also raised significant specific concerns regarding Delaware's proposal. (Please refer to the enclosed peer report for details.) The peers were particularly concerned about the construction of the value table. While believing a value table is one possible approach to a successful growth model, the peers did not feel that the Delaware value table, as presently constituted, properly accounts for student growth. The peers noted that the value table gives points for students performing at the same achievement level from one year to the next or even

regressing. In addition, the averaging of performance to determine whether appropriate growth has occurred may lead to the progress of high-achieving students masking the lack of progress among low-achieving students. These and additional concerns are presented in peer report that is enclosed.

The Department will rigorously evaluate the approved proposals, review information on how each pilot project is working, and share the results with other States, policymakers, and the public. With the knowledge gained from the approved growth models, the Department will be able to make an informed decision on whether to expand the pilot project beyond the 2006–07 school year.

In addition, the Secretary's initial announcement made clear that approval of a growth model for the pilot would also be contingent upon meeting several "bright line" principles, such as improving teacher quality. The Department recently informed Delaware that you are not currently in compliance with the requirements of Title II of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*, as amended by the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, since the state has not yet submitted data about how many classes are taught by a highly qualified teacher. Before we can consider a second proposal from Delaware, please work with René Islas of my staff to resolve this matter.

Assuming this Title II matter can be resolved, with this letter I am inviting Delaware to consider the peer reviewers' feedback and submit a revised proposal by September 15, 2006. Our intent is that the Department will again conduct an initial review and advance acceptable proposals to a second peer review to take place in mid-October that will be organized solely for Delaware and the five other States who have advanced to this point in the process. If successful, Delaware's growth model could be approved for implementation for the 2006–07 school year. If Delaware decides not to revise its current proposal based on this feedback and submit a revised proposal by September 15, or cannot resolve the Title II matter in time, the Department would welcome a new proposal from Delaware along with other States later this year. These proposals would be due to us by November 1, 2006. The limit of approved plans through this pilot project, however, will remain at ten.

Again, I appreciate your interest in the growth model pilot project and your continued efforts to ensure quality education for all children.

Sincerely,



Henry L. Johnson

Enclosures

cc: Governor Ruth Ann Minner  
Robin Taylor