



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY

JUL 1 2008

The Honorable Jim Rex
State Superintendent of Education
South Carolina Department of Education
1006 Rutledge Building
1429 Senate Street
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

Dear Superintendent Rex:

Thank you for submitting a proposal for the U.S. Department of Education's (Department) differentiated accountability pilot. I appreciate the work you and your staff have done to try to develop a more nuanced way of distinguishing between schools and districts in need of intensive intervention and those that are closer to reaching their goals.

As you know, the Department forwarded South Carolina's differentiated accountability proposal to a group of outside peer reviewers who evaluated each proposal to determine whether it was technically sound and consistent with the core principles of the pilot. The peers identified several strengths in South Carolina's proposal, including the fact that the proposed model leverages interventions offered under the state's accountability system and further aligns the state system of accountability with the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The peers were also impressed that, under the proposal, schools in the "Priority" category would receive intensive support through the External Review Team Liaison (ERTL). However, the peers also raised significant specific concerns regarding South Carolina's proposal. In particular, the peers were concerned that the specific interventions proposed are not fully developed or described in the proposal. The peers also noted that the proposal lacks a strong rationale for the cut-off points for the different categories of improvement and support. Based on the peers' concerns and the Department's own analysis of South Carolina's proposal, the Department is not approving South Carolina to participate in the differentiated accountability pilot at this time.

In the fall, the Department will once again invite any interested state to submit a proposal to participate in the differentiated accountability pilot for 2009–10 based on assessments administered in 2008–09. Details about the timing of this review are forthcoming. I encourage South Carolina to submit a revised proposal so that it may be considered for participation in the pilot in 2009–10. To aid you in this effort, I am enclosing a copy of the peer report regarding South Carolina's proposal, as well as a memorandum prepared by the peer reviewers that discusses some of the overarching issues the peers identified during their review of all of the proposals that were submitted for the pilot. Additionally, the Department will be hosting a roundtable later this summer to discuss methods of differentiation and evaluation, and I encourage you to participate in that discussion. Please note that the Department intends to continue to limit participation in the pilot to ten states. Accordingly, I encourage you to review

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The Department of Education's mission is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access.

the peers' report and memorandum carefully, and to contact my staff so that we may discuss ways you may be able to refine South Carolina's proposal.

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

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Kerri Briggs", written over the typed name.

Kerri L. Briggs, Ph.D.

Enclosures

cc: Governor Mark Sanford
Teri Siskind
Nancy Busbee