



# UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY

JAN 08 2009

The Honorable Dwight D. Jones  
Commissioner of Education  
Colorado Department of Education  
201 East Colfax Avenue  
Denver, Colorado 80203-1704

Dear Commissioner Jones:

As we approach our seventh year of implementing the accountability provisions of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, I want to take a moment to thank you and your colleagues for all your hard work to help realize the goals of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB) which has led to real and meaningful improvements in student achievement. These outcomes are due, in no small part, to the efforts of the dedicated educators in your state. We have seen an increased attention on high expectations for every child, an improvement in student performance across the board and a decrease in achievement gaps.

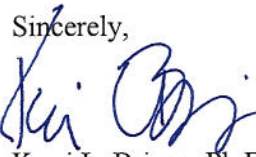
As Secretary Spellings is fond of saying, "what gets measured, gets done." With that in mind, I want to take this opportunity to update you on the status of some NCLB cornerstones with respect to Colorado. Detailed information on specific components of your state's assessment and accountability system is contained in an attachment to this letter.

- Assessment system: An assessment system that produces valid and reliable results is fundamental to an accountability system that holds schools and districts accountable for educating all students. Please accept my congratulations on Colorado's standards and assessment system meeting all statutory and regulatory provisions required for reading/language arts and mathematics as of 2007–08. Information regarding both the reading/language arts and mathematics assessment system used in determining adequate yearly progress for schools and districts in your state as well as details of the 2007–08 administration of science assessments are attached.
- Accountability components: The Department's new Title I regulations provide for greater scrutiny to states' accountability systems, including establishing a uniform and more accurate measure of calculating high school graduation rate that is comparable across states and requiring that states ensure that statistical measures maximize the inclusion of students and student subgroups in accountability determinations. Hence, the regulations also require that all states submit portions of their Accountability Workbook for peer review. In the attachment to this letter you will find information on Colorado's minimum group size, annual measurable objectives, confidence interval, full academic year definition, and graduation rate.
- Departmental flexibilities: Over the past several years, the Secretary has offered several flexibilities to states, such as growth model and differentiated accountability pilots, assessing students with disabilities and recently arrived limited English proficient students, and discretionary grant programs, such as the Teacher Incentive Fund, Enhanced Assessment Grants, and State Longitudinal Data System Grants. I am pleased to note that Colorado is participating in several of these endeavors.
  - Growth Model Pilot: The Department approved Colorado to use its growth model in making AYP determinations in January 2009 for the 2008–09 school year.
  - State Longitudinal Data System Grant: Longitudinal Education Data Access Plan; Amount: \$4,244,519

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- Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) Grant:
  - School District No. 1 for the City and County of Denver: Denver Public Schools plans to expand its Professional Compensation System for Teachers (ProComp) district-wide by first developing, implementing, and evaluating a performance-based compensation system for principals in partnership with New Leaders for New Schools. Denver will then strengthen its professional development, information and technology, and student assessment systems to ensure ProComp is consistently and rigorously implemented district-wide. Total Amount: \$13,968,476 (Year 1: \$5,747,869; Year 2: \$2,632,380; Year 3: \$5,588,227)
  - Eagle County School District plans to improve the quality of Master and Mentor teachers through increased salary augmentations and increased training (project includes 13 high-need schools). Total Amount: \$4,394,506 (Year 1: \$1,562,129; Year 2: \$1,427,150; Year 3: \$1,405,227)
  - Weld County School District plans to implement a comprehensive principal and teacher differentiated compensation system based on student achievement gains and classroom evaluations (project includes four high-needs schools). Total Amount: \$2,430,571 (Year 1: \$937,040; Year 2: \$755,482; Year 3: \$738,049)
  - Harrison School District Two plans to implement the *Recognizing Engagement in the Advancement of Learning* (REAL) program to close the achievement gap and advance student learning by recognizing the most effective teachers to teach the most at-risk youth (project includes 21 high-need schools). Total Amount: \$1,569,922 (Year 1: \$1,170,393; Year 2: \$399,529)
- Enhanced Assessment Grant (EAG): Colorado, in partnership with Iowa, Oregon, Illinois, Missouri, South Carolina, West Virginia, and Wyoming, received an EAG grant in fiscal year 2002 to improve alternate assessments for students with complex disabilities including developing, pilot testing, and analyzing assessment methods. Amount: \$1,746,023

In addition, for your information, I am enclosing a file that provides information across all states on the current assessment status, participation in flexibilities offered by the Department, AYP information, and discretionary grants. I wish you continued success in raising the achievement in Colorado. NCLB has focused our attention on closing achievement gaps and increasing the awareness of those students who have often been left behind: economically disadvantaged, limited English proficient, and students with disabilities. I have enjoyed the opportunity to work with you and all your colleagues across the country on such important issues.

Sincerely,  
  
 Kerri L. Briggs, Ph.D.

Enclosures

cc: Governor Bill Ritter  
 Beth Celva  
 Patrick Chapman

## Assessment System

Your assessment system met the requirements to be considered *Fully Approved with Recommendations*. This means that Colorado's system included academic content standards in reading/language arts, mathematics, and science; student achievement standards in reading/language arts and mathematics, alternate achievement standards for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities in reading/language arts and mathematics, assessments in each of grades 3-8 and high school in reading/language arts and mathematics, and alternate assessments in those subjects and meets all statutory and regulatory requirements. I encourage you to consider whether there are any areas in which the Department can provide or facilitate technical assistance to Colorado as you consider changes to your current assessment system.

- Colorado's science assessments are not yet fully compliant.
  - In 2007–08, the Department required that the state meet four minimal criteria related to the content area of science: have science content standards; have a general and alternate science assessment; include all students in one of the science assessments (i.e., either the general or alternate); and report the results of the science assessments. Colorado met these requirements.
  - In 2008–09, the Department will conduct peer reviews of science assessments and expects the assessments to be fully compliant. I know that Colorado submitted evidence regarding its assessments for review from October 25 through November 2. My staff will be sharing the peer notes and formal feedback as soon as possible. Beginning with the 2008–09 school year, science assessments will be included in the states' assessment status. For additional detail, please see the enclosed fact sheet.

## Accountability System

- Minimum group size (the state-defined minimum number of students necessary to have valid and reliable AYP determinations): Colorado's minimum group size is 30 students. (The average across all states is approximately 30 students.)
- Annual measurable objectives (AMO) (the yearly target for the percentage of students required to be proficient or above for a school to make AYP):
  - 2008–09: Colorado's goal for this year in reading/language arts is 88, 89, 87, and 90 percent of grades 3, 4-5, 6-8, and high school students, respectively, scoring proficient and in mathematics is 89, 80, 74 percent of grades 3-5, 6-8, and high school students, respectively, scoring proficient.
  - AMO type: Colorado set its AMOs consistent with the statutory requirements, using stair-step method. This means that Colorado's AMOs increased in three-year increments to reach 100 percent proficiency by 2013–14.
- Confidence interval: The state applies a confidence interval of 95 percent.
- Full academic year definition (for purposes of determining whether a student's score must be included in AYP determinations): In Colorado, a student must be enrolled on or before October 1 through the testing window in order to be included in school AYP determinations and enrolled for 12 months or more to be included in district AYP determinations.
- Graduation rate:
  - Currently, Colorado is using a graduation rate that can be described as a longitudinal cohort, which means that Colorado tracks the same students across time from 9th through 12th grade.
  - As required by the recently issued Title I regulations, states must report graduation rate data, in the aggregate and disaggregated by subgroup, using the four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate beginning with report cards providing assessment results for the 2010-11 school year.
  - The graduation rate target Colorado requires for the district or school to make AYP is 59.5 percent.
  - According to the National Governor's Association (NGA) 2008 report *Implementing Graduation Counts: State Progress to Date, 2008*, Colorado began reporting the NGA Compact 4-year graduation rate in 2008.

- Colorado was approved in 2007 to implement an additional safe harbor measure that uses a longitudinal model to compare the same students' score from the prior year to the current year. This approval will allow any district, school, or student group to make AYP provided there is a 10 percent decrease in the percentage of non-proficient scores in the current year compared to the previous year, comparing individual student assessment results in the current and previous year.