



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY

JAN 08 2009

The Honorable Deborah Gist
State Superintendent for Education
Office of the State Superintendent of Education
Government of the District of Columbia, One Judiciary Square
441 4th Street, NW, Suite 350 North
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Superintendent Gist:

As we approach our seventh year of implementing the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965* (ESEA), as amended by the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB), I want to take a moment to thank you and your colleagues for all your hard work to help realize the goals of 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 to high expectations for every child, an improvement in student performance across the board, and a decrease in achievement gaps.

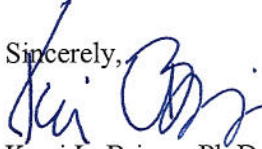
As Secretary Spellings is fond of saying, “what gets measured, gets done.” With that in mind, I want to take this opportunity to update you on the status of some NCLB cornerstones with respect to the District of Columbia. Detailed information on specific components of your state’s assessment and accountability 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 all public schools and districts accountable for educating all students. Information regarding the reading/language arts and mathematics assessments used in determining adequate yearly progress for schools and districts in your state as well as details of the state’s 2007–08 administration of science assessments are attached.
- Accountability components: The Department’s new Title I regulations provide for greater scrutiny of 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 the District of Columbia’s minimum group size, annual measurable objectives, confidence interval, full academic year definition, performance index, 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 the District of Columbia is participating in several of these endeavors.
 - Teacher Incentive Fund Grant: New Leaders, Inc. –Total Amount: \$7,043,927 (Year 1: \$3,036,837; Year 2: \$1,159,619; and Year 3: \$2,847,471)
 - Enhanced Assessment Grant: \$1,220,427

400 MARYLAND AVE. S.W., WASHINGTON, DC 20202
www.ed.gov

- Statewide Longitudinal Data System Grant: \$5,738,500
- District of Columbia-specific issues: Finally, I'd like to take this opportunity to remind you of recent concerns that we have raised. The District of Columbia's assessment system is still *Approval Pending* and Department has entered into a Memorandum of Agreement with the District to establish a timeline for reaching full approval. The District of Columbia did not meet the four core requirements in science laid out for states in 2007-08 and the Department withheld administrative funds accordingly. In addition, under 34 CFR §80.12, the Department has designated the District of Columbia, a "high-risk" grantee.

I wish you continued success in raising the achievement in the District of Columbia. NCLB has focused our attention on closing achievement gaps and increasing the awareness of those students who have often been left behind: economically disadvantaged students, students from racial and ethnic minorities, limited English proficient students, and students with disabilities. I hope you will keep in mind the issues I mentioned above as you continue to improve your educational system and provide the best possible education for all students in your state. 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: Mayor Adrian Fenty
Kimberly Statham
Shanika Hope

Assessment System

Your assessment system is *Approval Pending*. This means that the District of Columbia does not have a fully compliant assessment system that includes general and alternate assessments in grades 3-8 and high school in reading/language arts and mathematics and assessments in three grade spans (grades 3-5, 6-9, and 10-12) in science. I encourage you to consider whether there are any areas in which the Department can provide or facilitate technical assistance in meeting the statutory or regulatory requirements or as you consider changes to your current assessment system.

- Because your state's assessment system is not fully approved, the District of Columbia must submit evidence that was originally sent on April 25, 2008 and is enclosed with this letter. Further, the District of Columbia must submit the appropriate evidence as outlined in the signed Memorandum of Agreement of October 3, 2008 that pertains to the outstanding requirements.
- The District of Columbia's science assessments are not yet fully compliant.
 - In 2007–08, the Department required only that the state meet four minimal criteria: have science content standards; have a general and alternate assessment; include all students in the general and alternate science assessments; and report the results. The District of Columbia did not meet the inclusion requirements. The District of Columbia will need to submit the evidence listed in an attachment to this letter that was originally sent on October 16, 2008.
 - In 2008–09, the Department will conduct peer reviews of science assessments and expects the assessments to be fully compliant. Because the District of Columbia did not submit evidence of its science assessments for the October 2008 peer review, it must submit evidence for the March 23–27, 2009 peer review. Evidence for this review is due three weeks prior to the review. 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): The District of Columbia's minimum group size is 25. (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 the school to make AYP):
 - 2008–09: The District of Columbia's AMO for this year is 55 percent of students scoring proficient in mathematics and 61 percent (grades 3-6) and 58 percent (grades 7-11) in reading/language arts.
 - AMO type: The District of Columbia set its AMOs consistent with the statutory requirements, using a stair-step method. This means that AMOs increase in equal amounts every two years.
- Full academic year definition (for purposes of determining whether a student's score must be included in AYP determinations): In the District of Columbia, a student must be enrolled from the official enrollment date in October to the first day of the testing window in order to be included in AYP determinations for the school.
- Graduation rate:
 - Currently, the District of Columbia is using a graduation rate that can be described as a longitudinal cohort rate, meaning that the District of Columbia 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 the District of Columbia requires for a district or school to make AYP is the statewide average (69.9 percent). For schools below the state average, the graduation rate must increase by one percentage point from the previous year.

SUMMARY OF ADDITIONAL EVIDENCE THAT THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA MUST SUBMIT TO MEET ESEA REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA'S STANDARDS AND ASSESSMENTS

2.0 - ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT STANDARDS

1. The completed standards-setting manuals for both the DC CAS and DC CAS-Alt science tests that include:
 - a. Qualifications of the standards-setting judges;
 - b. Standard setting model and procedures, including the training programs for the judges;
 - c. Final performance level descriptors; and
 - d. The recommended cut scores.
2. Evidence that its state board has formally approved the achievement standards for both assessments in science.
3. Evidence that the number and percent of those students with disabilities assessed against alternate achievement standards, those assessed on an alternate assessment against grade-level standards, and those included in the regular assessment (including those administered with appropriate accommodations) are reported separately.

3.0 - FULL ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

1. Clarification of the DC CAS test design with appropriate technical documentation of equivalent forms.
2. Documentation showing that both the DC CAS and DC CAS-Alt science assessments include challenging academic content appropriate to the student population tested.

4.0 - TECHNICAL QUALITY

1. Evidence showing that the accommodations permitted do not fundamentally alter the construct being assessed. The evidence must include an examination of the impact of the read-aloud accommodation on the scores of students with disabilities and ELL students.
2. Evidence of the District of Columbia's guidelines and implementation of those guidelines allowing only those accommodations that do not invalidate students' scores.
3. Evidence that allowable accommodations, especially those that result in non-standard assessment conditions, yield results that can be meaningfully aggregated with those from non-accommodated tests.
4. A statement of the purposes that the science assessments are designed to serve and how DC ascertains that decisions based on the results are appropriate and consistent with these intended purposes. (DC CAS and DC CAS-Alt)
5. Evidence of an evaluation of unintended negative consequences of the science assessments. (DC CAS and DC CAS-Alt)
6. Evidence that its science assessments yield reliable scores that are consistent with the structures inherent to the state's academic content standards. (DC CAS and DC CAS-Alt)
7. Evidence of the relationships between science assessment performance and other relevant, external variables. (DC CAS)
8. Completed technical reports to document the technical quality of its science assessment system. (DC CAS and DC CAS-Alt)
9. Evidence of a policy and of the implementation of its policy for allowing only those accommodations that do not fundamentally alter the construct being assessed. The state must

provide evidence that students assessed under non-standard testing conditions are considered non-participants in the assessment system.

10. Evidence that judgmental and empirical methods are used to evaluate potential bias of items on the science tests. This evidence must include a description of the process, the participants, and the outcomes of these reviews.
11. Detailed test blueprints for DC CAS grades 3 and 5 and for high school Biology that support the development of comparable test forms over time that sample all of the relevant science standards.
12. A long-term equating plan that specifies field-test design and item development/acquisition procedures to support the development of test forms that are comparable.
13. Evidence of its quality control requirements for scoring and analyzing results for both the DC CAS and DC CAS-Alt science assessments, including scoring rubrics for the DC-CAS in science.
14. Evidence of continuous procedures (including regular engagement of the TAC) for using the results of monitoring and other analysis for improving the on-going quality of its assessment system. (DC CAS and DC CAS-Alt)

5.0 - ALIGNMENT

1. For the DC CAS assessment:
 - a. The rationale for the coverage of only approximately one third of science standards and clarification of whether or not the other two-thirds will be covered in future years;
 - b. Item specifications used to guide item writing (item content, format and scoring criteria);
 - c. Procedures and rationale for item selection; and
 - d. Two-way alignment studies that verify that the operational tests are aligned with the science content standards.
2. For the DC CAS-Alt assessment:
 - a. Policy and procedures for selection of prioritized skills for the DC CAS-Alt that ensures that students do not repeat the same skills over time; and
 - b. Evidence of alignment for the science assessment.

6.0 - INCLUSION

1. Evidence of training designed to ensure appropriate use of accommodations by general and special education and ELL teachers and test administrators.
2. A report of the number and percentage of students who took an assessment with a read-aloud accommodation in 2007-08. The report should include information on students with disabilities as a group and ELL students as a group.
3. Data confirming participation of all high school students in the biology assessment (DC CAS or DC CAS-Alt) at some point in their high school career.
4. Evidence of clarification to the field that students may not participate in the DC CAS-Alt on the basis of a 504 plan.

7.0 - REPORTING

1. An Individual Student Report for the District of Columbia Comprehensive Assessment System that includes the performance level descriptor or other information explaining the meaning of the achievement level that corresponds to a student's score, or evidence that this information is distributed to all parents with the Individual Student Report.

Science

2. Actual reports that address all requirements in this section, including:
 - a. School, district and state summary reports that include results for all required reporting;
 - b. subgroups as well as the number enrolled and the number tested/not;
 - c. An individual student report that includes results expressed as achievement levels with appropriate explanation of the meaning of the achievement levels accompanied by a detailed interpretive guide for parents in language that is understandable to them;
 - d. Evidence that test results will be delivered to parents and educators as soon as possible after the assessment is completed; and
 - e. Itemized score analyses by subdomain or standards that provides useful instructional information to educators.
3. Evidence that the state ensured that student-level assessment data are maintained securely to protect student confidentiality.