



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY

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

JAN 15 2009

Dear Superintendent Gist:

Thank you for submitting the enclosed two-year plan for reducing the use of the read-aloud accommodation (Reduction Plan). This plan amends the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the District of Columbia Office of the State Superintendent (OSSE) and the U.S. Department of Education (Department) signed on October 3, 2008. When the MOA was originally executed in October 2008, its purpose was to demonstrate how OSSE intended to come into compliance and administer a fully approved standards and assessment system for reading and mathematics in the 2008–09 school year as required of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). During the first few months of the implementation of the MOA, however, it became evident that full compliance would not be possible until test administration in the 2009–10 school year. OSSE needs more time to provide appropriate guidance and training to the field following the results of a validity study of the read-aloud accommodation, which is to be conducted by OSSE beginning in March 2009. Therefore, as amended by the Reduction Plan, the MOA now demonstrates how OSSE intends to come into compliance and administer a fully approved standards and assessment system for reading and mathematics in the 2009–10 school year. Particularly, OSSE will reduce by one-half the number of students who receive the read-aloud accommodation and are counted as valid participants in 2008–09, as compared to 2007–08, and, pending the results of the validity study, OSSE will not count any student as a participant who receives the read-aloud accommodation in 2009–10 for whom the results of the validity study indicate it is not a valid accommodation. Please note that the Department does not anticipate making any further amendments to the MOA.

Because OSSE's standards and assessment system does not meet all the requirements of section 1111(b)(1) and (3) of the ESEA, the Secretary is authorized, pursuant to section 1111(g)(2) of the ESEA, to withhold all or a portion of the District of Columbia's Title I, Part A administrative funds. The Secretary will refrain from utilizing her authority under that provision so long as OSSE complies with all material terms of the MOA, including complying with significant deadlines set forth in the timeline and including those provisions designated as Material Terms in the Reduction Plan. If, however, OSSE fails to comply with any material term of the MOA, the Secretary may initiate proceedings pursuant to her withholding authority under section 1111(g)(2) of the ESEA. If the Secretary should initiate withholding proceedings, in so doing and in determining the proper amount to be withheld, the Secretary will take into consideration the number of violations of the MOA by OSSE as well as any other relevant circumstances.

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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.

I appreciate the steps the District of Columbia has taken toward meeting the requirements of the ESEA. If you have any additional questions or would like to request technical assistance, please do not hesitate to contact Sue Rigney (Sue.Rigney@ed.gov) or Victoria Hammer (Victoria.Hammer@ed.gov).

Sincerely,



Alexander Goniprow
Deputy Assistant Secretary for Management and
Planning

Enclosure

cc: Mayor Adrian Fenty
Kimberly Statham

District of Columbia Office of the State Superintendent of Education Two-Year Plan for Reducing the Use of the Read-Aloud Accommodation

Background

In SY 2007-08, 2,099 students in the District of Columbia were administered the read-aloud accommodation on the English Language Arts DC Comprehensive Assessment System (DCCAS). The DC Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) recognizes that this accommodation has been over-used. In recognition of this fact, the OSSE is setting aggressive reduction targets for its LEAs. State-level activities will include targeted support and assistance to LEAs, professional development and verification of LEA reduction efforts. At the same time, the OSSE has commissioned the support of assessment experts to examine the impact of the read-aloud accommodation on the test construct, and to identify the specific population that should appropriately receive the read-aloud accommodation.

Defining the Target Population for the Read-Aloud Accommodation

It is anticipated that the results of the validity study will identify the population for whom the read-aloud accommodation is appropriate in light of the construct being assessed. While a final determination cannot be made until the results of the validity study are received, it is anticipated that the read-aloud accommodation will only be permissible for the reading assessment for a very narrow set of students.

Based on feedback received from the US Department of Education, the OSSE will require a 50% reduction in the use of the read-aloud accommodation for the 2009 administration of the DCCAS and a 100% reduction of this accommodation by 2010, except for those students who might appropriately receive the accommodation based on the results of the validity study.

Timeline of OSSE Actions and Specific Support to Local Educational Agencies

The OSSE is committed to providing sufficient support to help LEAs meet the read-aloud accommodation reduction targets identified above. The OSSE is also committed to providing guidance and support to our LEAs on an ongoing basis. A description of the state-level activities and our timeline for support is provided below.

Year 1 (SY 2008-09)

- Professional Development
 - The OSSE will facilitate several state-wide trainings to provide clarity on the use of the read-aloud accommodation to the following groups:
 - Public charter school leaders (February 2009)
 - DCPS principals' academy (1/28/09)
 - Quarterly meeting with DC LEA leaders (2/3/09)
 - DCPS special education coordinators training (Week of 2/9/09)
 - Public Charter School Board special education coordinators meeting (Mid-February 2009)

- Testing coordinator training – joint presentation by OSSE and CTB (Mid-March 2009)
 - Community meeting for parents of students with disabilities, key stakeholders and advocates (time: TBD)
- Verification
 - The OSSE will verify the LEAs' progress toward compliance with the reduction strategy on a regular basis beginning in January 2009
- Guidance and Policy
 - The OSSE will issue a revised policy memorandum from the State Superintendent of Education to clarify the memorandum that was released in December 2008 (January 2009)
 - The OSSE will release testing guidelines for students who receive accommodations on the 2009 DCCAS (January 2009)
 - Evidence of the revised policy and testing guidelines will be provided to the U.S. Department of Education upon its release to the LEAs in January 2009.*
- Validity Study
 - The construct validity study will be commenced in March 2009

Year 2 (SY 2009-10)

- Professional Development
 - The OSSE will host quarterly trainings for special education staff to provide policy updates and guidance to ensure compliance with the reduction strategy (September 2009 – June 2010)
- Verification
 - The OSSE will work with LEAs to ensure compliance with state policy guidance on the use of the read-aloud accommodation as determined by the results of the construct validity study
- Guidance and Policy
 - Upon completion of validity study, the OSSE will issue a revised policy statement clarifying the state's position on the use of the read-aloud accommodation (October 31, 2009)
 - Testing guidelines for students receiving accommodations will be released (October 31, 2009)
 - Evidence of the policy and the testing guidelines will be provided to the U.S. Department of Education upon its release to the LEAs by October 31, 2009.*

Proposed Impact on AYP Determinations

Consistent with the reduction targets described above for the 2009 test administration, we propose that the OSSE be permitted to count the scores of students that fall within that 50% reduction target for both participation and proficiency calculations. Students that exceed the 50% reduction target will be counted as non-participants and their scores will not be included in calculations of academic performance.

The Office of the State Superintendent of Education will provide evidence of the stated reduction in the read-aloud accommodation to the U.S. Department of Education by August 31, 2009.*

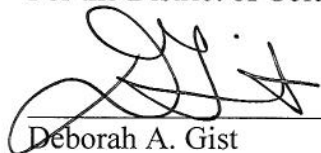
In 2010, (based on the 100% reduction target) students receiving the read-aloud accommodation, beyond that which may be determined as appropriate by the validity study currently being performed, will be counted as non-participants and their scores will not be included in calculations of academic performance.

The Office of the State Superintendent of Education will provide evidence of the stated reduction in the read-aloud accommodation to the U.S. Department of Education by August 31, 2010.*

This Two-Year Plan for Reducing the Use of the Read-Aloud Accommodation (Reduction Plan) demonstrates how the District of Columbia Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) intends to come into compliance and administer a fully approved standards and assessment system for reading and mathematics in the 2009-2010 school year. This Reduction Plan amends the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between OSSE and the U.S. Department of Education that was signed in October 2008, as well as Appendix A attached thereto and incorporated by reference into the MOA. To the extent any term of the Reduction Plan conflicts with a term of the MOA or Appendix A attached thereto, the terms of the Reduction Plan control and supersede the terms of the MOA and Appendix A. Any term in the Reduction Plan marked with an asterisk constitutes a Material Term of the Reduction Plan and of the MOA.

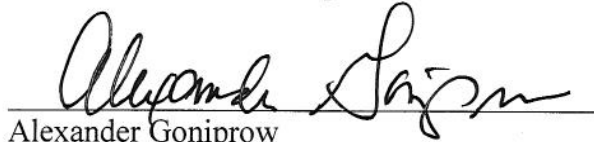
The effective date of this amendment is 5th day of January 2009.

For the District of Columbia Office of the State Superintendent of Education:



Deborah A. Gist
Superintendent
Office of the State Superintendent of Education

For the United States Department of Education:



Alexander Goniprow
Deputy Assistant Secretary for Management and Planning
Office of Elementary and Secondary Education