



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY

JAN 16 2009

The Honorable Mitch Chester
Commissioner
Massachusetts Department of Education
350 Main Street
Malden, Massachusetts 02148-5023

Dear Commissioner Chester:

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 Massachusetts. This letter, which includes more current information regarding the state's assessment system, replaces the one sent to you on January 8. 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 Massachusetts' 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 enclosed.
- 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 rates 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 Massachusetts'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 Massachusetts is participating in several of these endeavors.
 - Two percent transition flexibility: Massachusetts was approved in 2007-08 to include a proxy calculation for any school or district that did not make AYP due to the students with disabilities subgroup. Massachusetts is eligible for this flexibility because it is developing an alternate

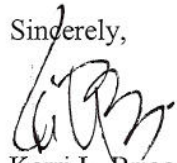
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assessment based on modified academic achievement standards for students with certain disabilities.

- Districts in need of improvement: Boston Public Schools is participating in this pilot, which allows districts that are in need of improvement to provide supplemental educational services.
- Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) Grant: Edward W. Brooke Charter School, Total amount: \$523,822 (Year 1: \$295,090; Year 2: \$228,732).

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 Massachusetts. 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 Deval Patrick
Kit Viator
Matt Pakos
Jeff Nelhaus

Assessment System

Massachusetts' assessment system met the requirements to be considered *Fully Approved*. This means Massachusetts' assessment system includes 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; and assessments and alternate assessments in each of grades 3 through 8 and one grade in high school in reading/language arts and mathematics. I encourage you to consider whether there are any areas in which the Department can provide or facilitate technical assistance to Massachusetts in meeting the statutory or regulatory requirements or as you consider changes to your current assessment system.

- Massachusetts' 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. Massachusetts 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 Massachusetts submitted evidence regarding its science assessments for peer review in May 2008. My staff has shared the peer notes and the Department will provide 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): Massachusetts' minimum group size is the lesser of 40 students or five percent of enrollment, up to a cap of 200 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: Massachusetts' goal for this year is 85 percent of students scoring proficient in reading/language arts and 77 percent in mathematics.
 - AMO type: Massachusetts set its AMOs consistent with the statutory requirements, using a stair-step method. This means that AMOs increase in equal increments every two years.
- Full academic year definition (for purposes of determining whether a student's score must be included in AYP determinations): In Massachusetts, a student must be enrolled from October 1st to the test window in order to be included in AYP determinations.
- Graduation rate:
 - Currently, Massachusetts is using a graduation rate that can be described as a longitudinal cohort rate, meaning it divides the number of students who graduated with a regular diploma by the number of 1st-time entering 9th graders four years previously, accounting for transfers in and out and deaths. This is similar to the graduate rate states will be required to use beginning in the 2010–11 school year.
 - 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 Massachusetts requires for the district or school to make AYP is 60 percent or a two percentage-point increase. Please note that the Department approved this graduation rate target for calculating AYP for the 2007–08 school year only. To obtain

approval for subsequent years, the Department expects that Massachusetts provide a more challenging graduation rate target in future years.

- According to the National Governor's Association 2008 report *Implementing Graduation Counts: State Progress to Date, 2008*, Massachusetts had the capability of calculating the 4-year rate in 2007.
- Massachusetts uses a performance index. The state has 5 levels for its index: students scoring proficient and advanced receive 100 points; "high – needs improvement" receive 75 points; "low – needs improvement" receive 50 points; "high – warning" receive 25 points; and "low – warning" receive 0 points. Massachusetts based its AMOs on the performance index.