



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY

JUN 10 2008

Dr. Gerald L. Zahorchak
Secretary of Education
Pennsylvania Department of Education
333 Market Street
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17126

Dear Secretary Zahorchak:

Thank you for submitting a proposal for the U.S. Department of Education's (Department) growth-based accountability model pilot project. I appreciate the work you and your staff have done to participate in this effort so far. The Department continues to believe that this pilot project can help determine whether growth models will, most importantly, provide a fair, reliable, and innovative mechanism for holding schools accountable for ensuring that all students reach grade-level standards in reading and mathematics by 2013–14.

As you know, a panel of peer experts reviewed Pennsylvania's growth model on April 24–25, 2008. During this review, the peers raised a number of substantive concerns with the structure of Pennsylvania's model. The peers identified several strengths in Pennsylvania's proposal, noting, for example, that the model shares many of the same characteristics as the models approved in Ohio and Tennessee. However, the peers were concerned about the overall Pennsylvania accountability system. I am enclosing a copy of the peer report for your consideration. The heart of the peers' concerns relates to the interaction of Pennsylvania's existing performance index with the growth model. The Department has concerns about the appropriateness of allowing a state to include both a performance index and a growth model in its accountability system. I will task the Department's recently announced National Technical Advisory Council to review this issue and provide feedback on if, and when, it may be reasonable for a state to include both components in its accountability system. We will provide additional guidance on this question this summer so that Pennsylvania may take this guidance into account when developing a revised proposal.

Based on the significance of the peers' concerns, the Department has decided not to approve Pennsylvania's proposal for implementation in the 2007–08 school year. I anticipate, however, that there will be other opportunities for Pennsylvania to implement a growth model in the future. The Department's recently released notice of proposed regulations would codify the existing growth model pilot in regulations. Moreover, the Department is planning to convene another peer review of state growth model proposals this fall and I invite Pennsylvania to consider the peer reviewers' feedback and submit a revised proposal for that review. If Pennsylvania's subsequent proposal is successful, Pennsylvania's growth model could be approved for implementation for the 2008–09 AYP determinations. More information about this next round of review will be forthcoming. I urge you to consider carefully the peer reviewers'

400 MARYLAND AVE. S.W., WASHINGTON, DC 20202
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feedback as you work to refine your growth model for the future. My staff and I are available to discuss the peers' concerns with you to help refine and improve your model.

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

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "K. Briggs".

Kerri L. Briggs, Ph.D.

Enclosure

cc: Governor Ed Rendell
Shula Nedley