



# UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY

JAN 8 2009

The Honorable Christopher Koch  
State Superintendent  
Illinois State Board of Education  
100 N First Street  
Springfield, IL 62777

Dear Superintendent Koch

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 Illinois. 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. Please accept my congratulations on Illinois' standards and assessment system meeting all statutory and regulatory provisions required for reading/language arts and mathematics as of 2007-08. 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 enclosed.
- 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 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 Illinois'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 Illinois is participating in several of these endeavors.
  - Differentiated Accountability Pilot: The Department approved Illinois in August 2008 to include its differentiated accountability model as part of its system of interventions beginning in the 2008-09 school year through the 2011-12 school year. Through this pilot, Illinois has also been

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

approved to reverse the order of services that schools in their first year of improvement are required to offer students, providing supplemental educational services before public school choice.

- Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) Grant: Recognizing Excellence in Academic Leadership (40 high-needs Chicago public schools); Total Amount: \$10,867,362 (Year 1: \$131,273; Year 2: \$4,055,600; Year 3: \$6,680,488)
  - Enhanced Assessment Grant (EAG): Obtaining Necessary Parity through Academic Rigor (ONPAR): Research, Development, and Dissemination of a Parallel Mathematics Assessment for ELLs; The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), on behalf of the 15-state World-class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) Consortium, will develop and implement a feasible, accessible, and valid assessment in mathematics for limited English proficient (LEP) students. Amount: \$1,890,401
  - Two percent transition flexibility: Illinois 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. Illinois is eligible for this flexibility because the SEA is developing an alternate assessment based on modified academic achievement standards for certain students with disabilities.
  - Districts in Need of Improvement Pilot: The Chicago Public Schools (CPS) was approved in 2008–09 to be a supplemental education services provider for schools in the district.
- Illinois-specific issues: Finally, I'd like to take this opportunity to remind you of recent concerns that we have raised. Illinois was eight days late with AYP determinations in 2008 due to problems with the accuracy of the assessment results. Providing timely notification to local educational agencies (LEAs) and the public is a vital component of a meaningful accountability system and ensures parents have full knowledge of their options as soon as possible regarding public school choice and supplemental educational services. Please note that the recently issued Title I regulations require an LEA to notify parents of their choice options sufficiently in advance of, but no later than 14 calendar days before, the start of school. To meet this requirement, an LEA must have timely notice from the state of whether its schools have made AYP.

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 Illinois. 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 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 Rod Blagojevich  
Connie Wise  
Melina Wright  
Joyce Zurkowski



## Assessment System

Your assessment system met the requirements to be considered *Fully Approved*. This means that Illinois' 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.

- Illinois' science assessments are not yet fully compliant.
  - In 2007–08, the Department required that the state meet four minimal criteria: have science content standards; have a general and alternate assessment; include all students in one of the science assessments (i.e., either the general or the alternate); and report the results. Illinois appears to meet these requirements but will need to submit evidence that (1) all students were included in the science assessments and (2) all students were included in results of the science assessments as reported on district-level report cards.
  - In 2008–09, the Department will conduct peer reviews of science assessments and expects the assessments to be fully compliant. Illinois must submit evidence regarding its science assessments for the peer review in March 23–27, 2009. 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): Illinois' minimum group size is 45 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: Illinois' AMO for this year is 70 percent of students proficient in grades 3–8 and in high school in reading/language arts and mathematics, respectively.
  - AMO type: Illinois set its AMOs consistent with the statutory requirements, using a mixed method. This means that Illinois' AMOs first increased after three years, then two years, then annually beginning in 2011–2012 through 2013–2014 to reach 100 percent proficient.
- Confidence interval: Illinois 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 Illinois, a student must be enrolled from May 1 of the previous school year in order to be included in AYP determinations for the school.
- Graduation rate:
  - Currently, Illinois is using a graduation rate that can be described as a longitudinal cohort rate, which means that Illinois tracks the same students across time from 9th through 12th grade. This is similar to the graduate rate states will be required to report 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 Illinois requires for a district or school to make AYP is 72 percent.
  - According to the National Governor's Association 2008 report *Implementing Graduation Counts: State Progress to Date, 2008*, "Illinois uses a cohort rate similar to the NGA Compact 4-year graduation rate, but has no plans to conform to the Compact formula rate."