



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY

JAN 8 2009

The Honorable Denise Juneau  
Superintendent of Public Instruction  
Montana Office of Public Instruction  
1227 11th Avenue  
Helena, Montana 59620-2501

Dear Superintendent Juneau:

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 Montana. 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 Montana's 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 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 Montana'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 Montana is participating in several of these endeavors.

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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.*

- Enhanced Assessment Grant: \$1,765,196
- Two percent transition flexibility for states developing alternate assessments based on modified academic achievement standards: Montana 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. Montana is eligible for this flexibility because the SEA is developing an alternate assessment based on modified achievement standards for certain students with disabilities.

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 Montana. 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 Brian Schweitzer  
Nancy Coopersmith

## Assessment System

Your assessment system is considered *Fully Approved*. This means Montana's standards and assessment system meets all statutory and regulatory requirements of Section 1111(b)(1) and (3) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

- Montana's 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. Montana has met these requirements.
  - In 2008–09, the Department will conduct peer reviews of science assessments and expects the assessments to be fully compliant. Because Montana 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): Montana's minimum group size is 30 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: Montana's goal for this year is 83 percent of students scoring proficient in reading/language arts and 68 percent in mathematics.
  - AMO type: Montana set its AMOs consistent with the statutory requirements, using a stair step method. This means that Montana's AMOs increased in equal increments every three years through 2013–2014 to reach 100 percent proficient.
- Confidence interval: Montana applies a 95 percent confidence interval to the percentage of students scoring proficient or above in the school.
- Full academic year definition (for purposes of determining whether a student's score must be included in AYP determinations): In Montana, a student must be enrolled on the first Monday in October to the beginning of the testing window in order to be included in AYP determinations for the school.
- Graduation rate:
  - Currently, Montana is using a graduation rate that can be described as a completer rate, which means that Montana divides the number of graduates by the number of graduates plus dropouts from grades 9-12.
  - As required by the recently published Title I regulations beginning with report cards providing assessment results for the 2010-2011 school year, States must report graduation rate data, in the aggregate and disaggregated by subgroup, using the four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate.
  - The graduation rate target Montana requires for a district or school to make AYP is 80 percent or any improvement from the previous year.
  - According to the National Governor's Association 2008 report *Implementing Graduation Counts: State Progress to Date, 2008*, it is undetermined when Montana will report the NGA Compact 4-year graduation rate.