



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY

JUL 1 2008

The Honorable T. Kenneth James
Director
Arkansas Department of Education
Four State Capitol Mall, Room 304 A
Little Rock, Arkansas 72201-1071

Dear Director James:

Thank you for submitting a proposal for the U.S. Department of Education's (Department) differentiated accountability pilot. I appreciate the work you and your staff have done to try to develop a more nuanced way of distinguishing between schools and districts in need of intensive intervention and those that are closer to reaching their goals.

As you know, the Department forwarded Arkansas' differentiated accountability proposal to a group of outside peer reviewers who evaluated each proposal to determine whether it was technically sound and consistent with the core principles of the pilot. The peers identified several strengths in Arkansas' proposal, including Arkansas' thoughtful and targeted approach to broad-based school improvement. The peers also noted that the Scholastic Audit protocol and the model's focus on feeder schools appear well grounded in research and practice. However, the peers also raised significant specific concerns regarding Arkansas' proposal. The peers raised concerns regarding the fact that Arkansas' method of differentiation does not account for the number of students in a particular subgroup that missed adequate yearly progress (AYP), which makes it possible for a school with its largest subgroup persistently missing AYP not to be subject to more intensive interventions. The peers were also troubled by the fact that the interventions for schools in the "Targeted" and "Whole School" categories are not substantively different from each other. Finally, the peers noted that Arkansas did not provide sufficient evidence to demonstrate the contention that the interventions for schools in the most intensive level of improvement are successful in turning around school performance. Based on the peers' concerns and the Department's own analysis of Arkansas' proposal, the Department is not approving Arkansas to participate in the differentiated accountability pilot at this time.

In the fall, the Department will once again invite any interested state to submit a proposal to participate in the differentiated accountability pilot for 2009–10 based on assessments administered in 2008–09. Details about the timing of this review are forthcoming. I encourage Arkansas to submit a revised proposal so that it may be considered for participation in the pilot in 2009–10. To aid you in this effort, I am enclosing a copy of the peer report regarding Arkansas' proposal as well as a memorandum prepared by the peer reviewers that discusses some of the overarching issues the peers identified during their review of all of the proposals that were submitted for the pilot. Additionally, the Department will be hosting a roundtable later this summer to discuss methods of differentiation and evaluation, and I encourage you to participate

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in that discussion. Please note that the Department intends to continue to limit participation in the pilot to ten states. Accordingly, I encourage you to review the peers' report and memorandum carefully, and to contact my staff so that we may discuss ways you may be able to refine Arkansas' proposal.

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

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Kerri Briggs".

Kerri L. Briggs, Ph.D.

Enclosures

cc: Governor Mike Beebe
Jannine Riggs