



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY

JUL 1 2008

The Honorable Lucille E. Davy
Commissioner
New Jersey Department of Education
100 River View Plaza
P.O. Box 500
Trenton, New Jersey 08625-0500

Dear Commissioner Davy:

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 New Jersey's 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 New Jersey's proposal, including the increase in the intensity of the interventions as schools progress from corrective action to restructuring, as well as the fact that the proposed interventions are based on proven best practices in school improvement. However, the peers also raised significant specific concerns regarding New Jersey's proposal. In particular, the peers were concerned that New Jersey's differentiation method relies on a combination of both normative and criterion-referenced methodologies. In that regard, the peers noted that New Jersey's use of the state average as one component to differentiate among schools identified for improvement may allow a school to exit the most intensive category of improvement even if the school's overall performance does not improve. Additionally, the peers were concerned that New Jersey's model does not propose to take significant interventions for the schools in restructuring that are consistently the lowest performing. Based on the peers' concerns and the Department's own analysis of New Jersey's proposal, the Department is not approving New Jersey 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 New Jersey 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 New Jersey's 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 New Jersey's proposal.

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

Sincerely,



Kerri L. Briggs, Ph.D.

Enclosures

cc: Governor Jon Corzine
Willa Spicer