



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY

JUL 1 2008

The Honorable Barbara Thompson
Interim Commissioner of Education
Alaska Department of Education & Early Development
Goldbelt Place
801 West Tenth Street, Suite 200
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1894

Dear Commissioner Thompson:

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 Alaska'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 Alaska's proposal, including that the proposal was designed with the intent to improve teaching and learning in schools identified for improvement. However, the peers also raised significant specific concerns regarding Alaska's proposal. In particular, the peers were concerned that the interventions for schools identified for improvement were limited in intensity and focus. The peers were also troubled by the fact that Alaska's proposal lacked a strengthening of interventions for the schools in restructuring that are consistently among the lowest-performing schools. Additionally, the peers expressed concerns over the fact that the interventions for schools in the various categories of improvement were not substantively different from one another. Finally, the peers noted that the proposal lacked data or research to support the method of differentiation. Based on the peers' concerns and the Department's own analysis of Alaska's proposal, the Department is not approving Alaska 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 Alaska 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 Alaska'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 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 Alaska's proposal.

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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.

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 Sara Palin
Les Morse