



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY

JAN 13 2009

The Honorable Larry LeDoux
Commissioner of Education
Alaska Department of Education and Early Development
801 West 10th Street
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1894

Dear Commissioner LeDoux:

I am writing regarding our second review of Alaska's science assessments under the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA), as amended by the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB).

As outlined in my letter of February 28, 2008, states had to meet four basic requirements in science for the 2007-08 school year, which Alaska met. For the 2008-09 school year, Alaska must provide evidence for peer review that demonstrates full compliance of its science standards and assessments with the statutory and regulatory requirements of the ESEA. In anticipation of meeting that requirement, Alaska participated in an optional technical assistance peer review in May 2008. Then, in October 2008, Alaska submitted additional evidence for peer review. I appreciate the effort that was required to prepare for these peer reviews and hope that the process provided useful feedback to support Alaska's efforts to monitor student progress toward meeting challenging science standards.

My letter to you on October 5, 2006 stated that Alaska's standards and assessment system was designated fully approved. That designation included only Alaska's reading/language arts and mathematics assessments. However, based on the evidence Alaska submitted for the October 2008 peer review, we have concluded that Alaska's science standards and assessments meet most, but not yet all the statutory and regulatory requirements of section 1111(b)(1) and (3) of the ESEA. As a result, the status of Alaska's standards and assessment system, of which science standards and assessments are an integral part, is now **Approval Expected**. This status indicates that the evidence submitted to date suggests that Alaska has administered a reading, mathematics, and science assessment system in grades 3-8 and high school in 2007-08 that is fully compliant with the applicable statutory and regulatory requirements, but that certain elements of Alaska's system must still be submitted. To be fully approved, Alaska must demonstrate that all components of its standards and assessment system as administered in 2008-09, including general and alternate assessments for science, comply with all ESEA requirements for standards and assessment systems.

Specifically, for both the general science assessment and the alternate science assessment based on alternate academic achievement standards, we have concerns regarding academic achievement standards, technical quality, and assessment reports. In addition, although Alaska

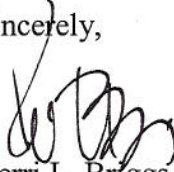
400 MARYLAND AVE. S.W., WASHINGTON, DC 20202
www.ed.gov

The Department of Education's mission is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access.

has met the requirement for inclusion, the Department recommends that Alaska monitor and improve the participation rates for various subgroups in all grade levels, and for all subgroups in grade 10. The complete list of evidence needed to address these concerns is enclosed with this letter. We have scheduled another peer review for states' science assessments for March 23 - 27, 2009. All materials for review must be provided to the Department three weeks before the scheduled peer review.

We look forward to working with Alaska to support a high-quality standards and assessment system. If you would like to discuss this further, please do not hesitate to contact Sharon Hall (sharon.hall@ed.gov) or Abby Potts (abigail.potts@ed.gov).

Sincerely,



Kerri L. Briggs, Ph.D.

Enclosure

cc: Governor Sarah Palin
Erik McCormick

SUMMARY OF ADDITIONAL EVIDENCE THAT ALASKA MUST SUBMIT TO MEET ESEA REQUIREMENTS FOR STANDARDS AND ASSESSMENTS

2.0 – ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT STANDARDS

- Evidence of science content experts and diverse stakeholder involvement in the development of the academic achievement standards for the general assessment (the standards-based assessments, or SBA) and alternate assessments based on alternate academic achievement standards (AA-AAAS). (2.6)
- Documentation that reports include the number and percent of the students with disabilities assessed on alternate assessments based on alternate academic achievement standards in science, and included in the general science assessments (with and without appropriate accommodations). (2.3.2.c)

4.0 – TECHNICAL QUALITY

SBA

- A plan to address intended and unintended consequences of the SBA. (4.1.b)
- A plan for equating subsequent administrations of the SBA. (4.2.c)
- Evidence that the use of accommodations yields meaningful scores. (4.3.d)
- Evidence that the state monitors the availability and implementation of accommodations for use during science assessments. (4.6.e)

AA-AAAS

- Evidence of inter-rater consistency in scoring and a plan for maintaining consistency of scores over time. (4.2.c)

7.0 – REPORTING

- Evidence that electronic transmissions of score data are secure. (7.4)

Note: The number next to each statement of required evidence refers to a critical element in the “Peer Review Notes for Evidence of Science Assessments”.