



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY

JAN 08 2009

The Honorable Alice Seagren  
Commissioner  
Minnesota Department of Education  
1500 Highway 36 West  
Roseville, Minnesota 55113

Dear Commissioner Seagren:

As we approach our seventh year of implementing the accountability provisions of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, I want to take a moment to thank you and your colleagues for all your hard work to help realize the goals of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (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 on 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 Minnesota. Detailed information on specific components of your state's assessment and accountability system is contained in an attachment to this letter.

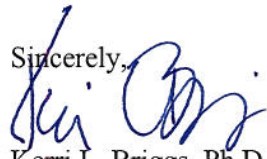
- Assessment system: An assessment system that produces valid and reliable results is fundamental to an accountability system that holds schools and districts accountable for educating all students. Please accept my congratulations on Minnesota's standards and assessment system meeting all statutory 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 to states' accountability systems, including establishing a uniform and more accurate measure of calculating high school graduation rates 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 Minnesota's minimum group size, annual measurable objectives, confidence interval, full academic year definition, 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 (LEP) 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 Minnesota is participating in several of these endeavors.
  - General Supervision Enhancement Grant:

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- Minnesota received funds to work toward development of an alternate assessment based on alternate academic achievement standards. (Year 1: \$398,382; Year 2: \$297,642; Year 3: \$279,432)
- Minnesota, in partnership with the Ohio Department of Education, Ohio, and Oregon, received funds to work toward development of an alternate assessment based on modified achievement standards (AA-MAAS). (Year 1: \$1,075,314; Year 2: \$840,567; Year 3: \$887,319)
- Enhanced Assessment Grant: Modifications for a Better Assessment of What Students with Disabilities Know and Can Do; In collaboration with Ohio, Oregon, and the American Institutes for Research (AIR), the Minnesota Department of Education plans to improve its planned alternate assessment based on modified academic achievement standards (AA-MAAS). Amount: \$1,523,907
- Two percent transition flexibility: Minnesota 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 in grades 3-8. Minnesota is eligible for this flexibility because the SEA is developing an alternate assessment based on modified academic achievement standards (AA-MAAS) for certain students with disabilities.
- Growth Model Pilot: The Department recently approved Minnesota to use its growth model in making AYP determinations for the 2008-09 school year through 2012-13.
- Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems: Longitudinal Data Systems to Support Data-Driven Decision-Making; Amount: \$3,272,448

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 Minnesota. NCLB has focused our attention on closing achievement gaps and increasing the awareness of those students who have often been left behind: economically disadvantaged, limited English proficient, 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 Tim Pawlenty  
 Dirk Mattson  
 Tom Boatman



## Assessment System

Your assessment system met the requirements to be considered *Fully Approved*. This means that Minnesota's system includes academic content standards in reading/language arts, mathematics, and science; student academic achievement standards in reading/language arts and mathematics; alternate academic achievement standards for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities in reading/language arts and mathematics; and assessments and alternate assessments in each of grades 3 through 8 and one grade in high school for reading/language arts and mathematics and meets all statutory and regulatory requirements. I encourage you to consider whether there are any areas in which the Department can provide or facilitate technical assistance to Minnesota as you consider changes to your current assessment system.

- Minnesota'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. Minnesota has met these requirements.
  - In 2008–09, the Department will conduct peer reviews of science assessments and expects the assessments to be fully compliant. I know that Minnesota submitted evidence regarding your general and alternate science assessments for review from October 25 through November 2. My staff will be sharing the peer notes and formal feedback as soon as possible. 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): Minnesota's minimum group size is 20. (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: Minnesota's goal for this year is 80, 78, 80, 79, 75, 74, and 49 percent of grades 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and high school students, respectively, scoring proficient in reading/language arts and 85, 78, 71, 70, and 49 percent of grades 3, 4, 5-7, 8, and high school students, respectively, scoring proficient in mathematics.
  - AMO type: Minnesota set its AMOs consistent with the statutory requirements, using a mixed method. This means Minnesota's AMO's increased first after two years and then annually through 2013–14 to reach 100% proficient.
- Confidence interval: The state applies a confidence interval of 95 to 99 percent (based on school size).
- Full academic year definition (for purposes of determining whether a student's score must be included in AYP determinations): In Minnesota, a student must be enrolled on October 1<sup>st</sup> in order to be included in AYP determinations.
- Graduation rate:
  - Currently, Minnesota is using a graduation rate that can be described as a completer rate, which is the number of graduates divided by the number of graduates plus dropouts in each of the four years.
  - As required by the recently issued Title I regulations, states must report graduation rate data, in the aggregate and disaggregated by subgroup, using the four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate beginning with report cards providing assessment results for the 2010-11 school year.
  - The graduation rate target Minnesota requires for the district or school to make AYP is 80 percent or improvement from previous year.

- According to the National Governor's Association (NGA) 2008 report *Implementing Graduation Counts: State Progress to Date, 2008*, began reporting the NGA Compact 4-year graduation rate in 2008.
- Minnesota uses a performance index when calculating AYP, which provides half credit to schools and districts for any student scoring at level 2 (Basic) and full credit for students scoring at Levels 3 and 4. Minnesota's AMOs were set based on this performance index.