



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY

JAN 8 2009

The Honorable Terry Bergeson  
State Superintendent of Public Instruction  
Washington Department of Public Instruction  
P.O. Box 47200  
Olympia, Washington 98504-7200

Dear Superintendent Bergeson:

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 Washington. 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 Washington's standards and assessment system meeting all statutory and regulatory provisions required for reading/language arts, mathematics, and science as of 2007-08.
- 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 rate 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 Washington'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 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 Washington is participating in two of these endeavors.
  - Two percent transition flexibility: Washington 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. Washington is eligible for this flexibility because the SEA is developing an alternate assessment based on modified academic achievement standards (AA-MAAS).

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

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discretionary grants. I wish you continued success in raising the achievement in Washington. 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 Christine Gregoire  
Bob Harmon  
Joe Willhoft

## Assessment System

Your assessment system met the requirements to be considered *Fully Approved*. This means that Washington's assessment system includes assessments in grades 3-8 and high school in reading/language arts and mathematics and assessments in three grade spans (grades 3-5, 6-9, and 10-12) in science. I encourage you to consider whether there are any areas in which the Department can provide or facilitate technical assistance to Washington if you are considering changes to your current assessment system. Additional detail about the status of state assessment systems can be found in the enclosed fact sheet.

## Accountability System

- Minimum group size (the state-defined minimum number of students necessary to have valid and reliable AYP determinations): Washington's minimum group size is 30 students or 1 percent of the tested population for schools with more than 3,000 students. (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: Washington's goal for this year in reading/language arts is 76, 65, 74 percent of grades 3-5, 6-8, and high school students, respectively, scoring proficient and in mathematics is 65, 59, and 62 percent of grades 3-5, 6-8, and high school students, respectively, scoring proficient.
  - AMO type: Washington set its AMOs consistent with the statutory requirements, using a stair-step method. This means Washington's AMOs increase in three-year increments.
- Confidence interval: The state applies a confidence interval of 99 percent.
- Full academic year definition (for purposes of determining whether a student's score must be included in AYP determinations): In Washington, a student must be enrolled from October 1 through the test administration continually and uninterrupted in order to be included in AYP determinations.
- Graduation rate:
  - Currently, Washington is using a five-year graduation rate. First, Washington multiplies the dropout rate for grades 9-12 multiplied by 100. Then, Washington divides the number of students who graduate in five years or less by this rate.
  - 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 Washington requires for the district or school to make AYP is 67 percent or 2 percent improvement over the previous year.
  - According to the National Governor's Association (NGA) 2008 report *Implementing Graduation Counts: State Progress to Date, 2008*, Washington is taking steps to report the NGA Compact 4-year graduation rate by 2009.