



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY

JAN 08 2009

The Honorable Mike Rush
Executive Director
Idaho State Board of Education
650 West State Street
P.O. Box 83720
Boise, Idaho 83720-0037

The Honorable Tom Luna
Superintendent of Public Instruction
Idaho Department of Education
Len B. Jordan Office Building
650 West State Street
P. O. Box 83720
Boise, Idaho 83720

Dear Executive Director Rush and Superintendent Luna:

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 Idaho. 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. 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 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 Idaho’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

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disabilities, 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 Idaho is participating in several of these endeavors.

- Two percent transition flexibility: Idaho 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. Idaho is eligible for this flexibility because the SEA is developing an alternate assessment based on modified academic achievement standards for students with certain disabilities.
 - In 2005, Idaho received an Enhanced Assessment Grant of \$1,535,349.
 - General Supervision Enhancement Grantee: Idaho is working towards the development of an alternate assessment based on alternate academic achievement standards. (Year 1: \$386,663; Year 2: \$298,274; and Year 3: \$289,022)
- Idaho-specific issues: Finally, I'd like to take this opportunity to remind you of recent concerns that we have raised regarding Idaho's alternate assessments based on alternate achievement standards and their development.

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 Idaho. 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 Butch Otter
Margo Healy

Assessment System

Your assessment system met the requirements to be considered *Fully Approved*. This means that Idaho's assessment system includes assessments in grades 3-8 and high school in reading/language arts and mathematics. The Department has been providing technical assistance as Idaho reassesses its alternate assessments, and I encourage you to consider whether there are any other areas in which the Department can provide or facilitate technical assistance to Idaho in meeting the statutory or regulatory requirements or as you consider changes to your current assessment system.

- Idaho'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. Idaho appears to have met these requirements.
 - 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.
- I know that Idaho 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.

Accountability System

- Minimum group size (the state-defined minimum number of students necessary to have valid and reliable AYP determinations): Idaho's minimum group size is 34. (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: Idaho's goal for this year is 78 percent of students scoring proficient in reading/language arts and 70 percent in mathematics.
 - AMO type: Idaho set its AMOs consistent with the statutory requirements, using a mixed method. This means that AMOs increase in equal increments every three, then two years.
- Full academic year definition (for purposes of determining whether a student's score must be included in AYP determinations): In Idaho, a student must be enrolled from the first eight weeks of the year through the spring testing window in order to be included in AYP determinations.
- Graduation rate:
 - Currently, Idaho is using a graduation rate that can be described as a completer rate, which means that Idaho divides the number of graduates by the number of graduates plus the dropouts from each of the previous 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 Idaho requires for the district or school to make AYP is 90 percent or some improvement from the previous year.
 - According to the National Governor's Association 2008 report *Implementing Graduation Counts: State Progress to Date, 2008*, it is unclear when Idaho will be able to report the NGA Compact 4-year graduation rate.