



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY

The Honorable Peter McWalters  
Commissioner of Education  
Rhode Island Department of Education  
Shepard Building  
255 Westminster Street  
Providence, RI 02903

JAN 15 2009

Dear Commissioner McWalters:

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 Rhode Island. This letter, which includes more current information regarding the state's assessment system, replaces the one sent to you on January 8. 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 Rhode Island'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 Rhode Island'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 Rhode Island is participating in one of these endeavors.
  - Enhanced Assessment Grant:

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- Obtaining Necessary Parity through Academic Rigor (ON PAR): Research, Development, and Dissemination of Alternate (Parallel) Assessments for English Language Learners; Rhode Island, on behalf of the 13-state World-class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) Consortium, proposes to develop and implement an accessible and valid assessment for beginning English language learners (ELLs) that can be used for state accountability purposes to meet the requirements of federal law. Award Amount: \$2.1 million
- Reaching the "Students in the Gap" through Web-based Module Assessments: In collaboration with the New England Compact, Rhode Island will participate in the development of a web-based Task Module Assessment (TMAS) prototype to address the needs of students with moderate cognitive deficits or severe learning disabilities who do not qualify for the alternate assessment, but perform poorly on current regular assessment tests. Award Amount: \$0.7 million
- The New England Compact, a Four-State Consortium to Enhance the Quality of Their State Assessment Systems; Rhode Island, in collaboration with Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont, will enhance their assessment system to meet and go beyond filling the requirement for assessments as described in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Award Amount: \$1.8 million.

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 Rhode Island. 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 Donald L. Carcieri  
Mary Ann Snider



## Assessment System

Your assessment system met the requirements to be considered *Fully Approved*. This means Rhode Island's system includes academic content standards in reading/language arts, mathematics, and science; student achievement standards in reading/language arts and mathematics; alternate 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 in reading/language arts and mathematics and meets all statutory and regulatory requirements.

- Rhode Island'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. Rhode Island met those requirements.
  - In 2008–09, the Department will conduct peer reviews of science assessments and expects the assessments to be fully compliant. Because Rhode Island did not submit evidence of its science assessments for the October 2008 peer review, it must submit evidence for the March 23–27, 2009 peer review. Evidence for this review is due three weeks prior to the review. 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): Rhode Island's minimum group size is 45. (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: Rhode Island's goal for this year is 84, 79, and 75 percent of grades 3-5, 6-8, and high school students, respectively, scoring proficient in reading/language arts and 75, 64, and 63 percent of grades 3-5, 6-8, and high school students, respectively, scoring proficient in mathematics.
  - AMO type: Rhode Island set its AMOs consistent with the statutory requirements, using a mixed method. This means that Rhode Island's AMOs first increased after two years, then three years, then annually through 2013–14 to reach 100 percent proficient.
- Confidence interval: The state applies a confidence interval of 95 percent.
- Full academic year definition (for purposes of determining whether a student's score must be included in AYP determinations): In Rhode Island, a student must be enrolled on October 1 to the end of that prior school year in order to be included in AYP determinations.
- Graduation rate:
  - Currently, Rhode Island is using a graduation rate that can be described as a completer rate, which is the number of graduates divided by the number of dropouts in each of the four previous 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 Rhode Island requires for the district or school to make AYP is 79.2 percent.
  - According to the National Governor's Association 2008 report *Implementing Graduation Counts: State Progress to Date, 2008*, Rhode Island reported that it could begin reporting the NGA Compact 4-year graduation rate in 2008.

- Rhode Island uses a performance index when calculating AYP, which provides 25 points to schools and districts for any student scoring at low range of Substantially Below Proficient, 50 points to students in the high range of Substantially Below Proficient, 50 points to students scoring Partially Proficient and full credit for students scoring Proficient and Advanced. Rhode Island's AMOs were set based on this performance index.