



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY

The Honorable Paul G. Pastorek  
Superintendent of Education  
Louisiana Department of Education  
PO Box 94064  
1201 North 3rd Street, 5th Floor  
Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70804-9064

JAN 15 2009

Dear Superintendent Pastorek:

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 Louisiana. 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 Louisiana’s standards and assessment system meeting all statutory and regulatory provisions required for reading/language arts, mathematics, and science.
- 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 Louisiana’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 Louisiana is participating in several of these endeavors.
  - Differentiated Accountability: Louisiana is approved to implement its differentiated accountability model as part of its system of interventions beginning in the 2009–10 school year through the 2012–13 school year. Through this pilot, Louisiana has also been approved to flip the order of services that schools in their first year of improvement are required to offer students, providing supplemental educational services before public school choice.

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- General Supervision Enhancement Grantee: Led by WestED, Kansas and Louisiana have received funds towards the development of their alternate assessments based on modified academic achievement standards. (Year1: \$774,608 ; Year2: \$589,969; Year 3: \$585,554)

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 Louisiana. 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 Bobby Jindal  
Scott Norton  
Thomas Spencer

## Assessment System

Your assessment system is currently *Fully Approved*. This means Louisiana's standards and assessment system meets all statutory and regulatory requirements of Section 1111(b)(1) and (3) of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)*, as amended by the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)*, including 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. For additional detail, please see the enclosed fact sheet.

- In 2007–08, Louisiana included in AYP determinations the scores of students with disabilities who are proficient or above (up to a 2.0 percent cap at the district and state levels) on the Louisiana Alternate Assessment 2 (LAA2), an alternate assessment based on modified academic achievement standards. Louisiana must submit the remaining evidence as outlined in the September 3, 2008 letter and enclosed. I encourage you to consider whether there are any areas in which the Department can provide or facilitate technical assistance in meeting the statutory or regulatory requirements. 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): Louisiana's minimum group size is 10. (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: Louisiana's goal for this year is 58 percent of students scoring proficient in reading/language arts and 54 percent in mathematics.
  - AMO type: Louisiana set its AMOs consistent with the statutory requirements, using mixed method. This means first AMOs increase in equal increments every three years and starting in 2010–11 increase every year towards 100 percent proficiency in 2013–14.
- Confidence interval: The state applies a 99 percent confidence interval.
- Full academic year definition (for purposes of determining whether a student's score must be included in AYP determinations): In Louisiana, a student must be enrolled from October 1<sup>st</sup> through the test administration date in order to be included in AYP determinations.
- Graduation rate:
  - Currently, Louisiana is using a graduation rate that can be described as a longitudinal cohort rate. Louisiana divides the number of students who graduated by the number of 1st-time entering 9<sup>th</sup>-graders four years previously, accounting for transfers in and out until October 1 of the cohort's eleventh grade year.
  - 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 Louisiana requires for the district or school to make AYP is 65 percent.
  - According to the National Governor's Association 2008 report *Implementing Graduation Counts: State Progress to Date, 2008*, Louisiana had the capability of calculating the 4-year rate in 2006.

**To support Louisiana’s preparation for the successful completion of the peer review process, peer reviewer comments and staff recommendations have been organized and coded to reflect Critical Elements in the *Standards and Assessments Peer Review Guidance: Information and Examples for Meeting Requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Revised December 21, 2007 to include modified academic achievement standards)*\***

## **2.0 Academic Achievement Standards**

1. The LDE must provide guidance in the decision making process for IEP teams about which assessment is appropriate. (2.3.2 and 6.2.3)

## **3.0 Statewide System of Annual High Quality Assessments**

1. Coherent information about the assessment system for students with disabilities across grades and subjects, including the requirement for students participating in LAA2 to be functioning three grades below the enrolled grade. (3.4)

## **4.0 Technical Quality**

1. Documentation of validity, including evidence that addresses all parts of Critical Element 4.1 (a through g), including evidence that the state has conducted all the same analyses related to item evaluation (e.g. DIF, bias/sensitivity, etc) for this assessment as for the general assessment, a chart or table that shows the results of the characteristics of the final selection of items, studies to demonstrate external correlation with other measures of student achievement such as student performance on another standardized assessment, guidance regarding the appropriate decisions that can be made with the results of the LAA2, and evidence that the State has addressed intended and unintended consequences
2. Documentation of reliability, including evidence that addresses all parts of Critical Element 4.2 (a through c), including a plan for improving the reliability of score for subpopulations, clarification regarding the use of reliability data from the pilot (2006) rather than 2007 data, accuracy and consistency statistics for each assessment at least at the “proficiency” level, and reliability among schools. (4.2)
3. An evaluation of the accommodations used with the LAA2. (4.6)
4. A plan for monitoring or reviewing the quality of the assessment itself. (4.5)

## **5.0 Alignment**

1. Independent evidence or verification of alignment 5.1
2. Evidence that the LAA2 reflects the full range of the academic content standards for the grades tested, and describes what changes in cognitive complexity or difficulty, if any, have been made in relation to the general assessments. (5.2)
3. Evidence such as detailed blueprints that indicate the LAA2 reflects both the content knowledge and procedural or process skills (such as the application of knowledge to solve problems, or understanding of scientific method) as represented in the State’s academic content standards, and a description of changes made in test structure or format, if any, relative to the general test. (5.3)
4. Evidence that the LAA2 reflects the same degree and pattern of emphasis as the States academic content standards for the grades tested. (5.4)

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\* Available at <http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/saaprguidance.doc>

## 6.0 Inclusion

1. Guidelines for Individualized Educational Program (IEP) teams to apply in determining when a child's cognitive disability justifies assessment based on modified academic achievement standards, including clarification of the "three grades below" criteria (6.2 1a)
2. A clear explanation of the differences between assessments based on grade-level academic achievement standards and those based on modified or alternate academic achievement standards, including the relation between "basic" on the general assessment and "basic" on the AA-MAS (6.2.1c)
3. Criteria for IEP Teams to use to determine which students with disabilities are eligible to be assessed based on modified academic achievement standards that include, at a minimum, each of the following:
  - The student's disability has precluded the student from achieving grade-level proficiency as demonstrated by objective evidence of the student's academic performance; **and**
  - The student's progress to date in response to appropriate instruction, including special education and related services designed to address the student's individual needs, is such that, even if significant growth occurs, the IEP Team is reasonably certain that the student will not achieve grade-level proficiency within the year covered by the student's IEP; **and**
  - The student's IEP goals for subjects assessed by the statewide system are based on the academic content standards for the grade in which the student is enrolled. (6.2.2a)
4. Evidence that the State has informed IEP Teams that a student may be assessed based on modified academic achievement standards in one or more subjects (6.2.2b)
5. Evidence that the State has established and monitored implementation of clear and appropriate guidelines for developing IEPs that include goals based on content standards for the grade in which a student is enrolled (6.2.2c)
6. Evidence that the State has ensured that students who are assessed based on modified academic achievement standards have access to the curriculum, including instruction, for the grade in which the students are enrolled (6.2.2d)
7. Evidence that the State has ensured that students who take an alternate assessment based on modified academic achievement standards are not precluded from attempting State diploma requirements (6.2.2e)

## 7.0 Reports

1. Sample summary reports at the State, LEA and school levels that clearly display results for the AA-MAS, including the number of eligible students enrolled or number tested/not tested (7.2)