



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY

MAY 17 2006

The Honorable Susan Castillo
Superintendent of Public Instruction
Oregon Department of Education
255 Capitol Street, N.E.
Salem, OR 97310-0203

Dear Superintendent Castillo:

Thank you for submitting a proposal for the U.S. Department of Education's (Department) growth-based accountability model pilot project. I realize that our timelines were tight and sometimes inconvenient; I appreciate the work you and your staff have done to participate in this effort so far. The Department continues to believe that this pilot project can help determine whether growth models will, most importantly, provide a fair, reliable, and innovative mechanism for holding schools accountable for ensuring that all students reach grade-level standards in reading and mathematics by 2013-14.

In mid-March, the Department determined that Oregon was meeting the "bright line principles" of the law – that is, ensuring all students are learning, making the system accountable, providing information and offering parents options, and improving teacher quality – and that the Oregon growth model proposal seemed poised to meet the seven core principles outlined by Secretary Spellings in her letter on November 21, 2005. As such, Oregon's proposal was forwarded to a group of peer reviewers who met on April 17-18, 2006. The range of changes and the number of conditions that the peer reviewers indicated would be required for Oregon's model to be acceptable would be tantamount to writing a new proposal. On that basis, the Department is not approving the Oregon proposal. However, with this letter I am inviting Oregon to consider the peer reviewers' feedback and submit a revised proposal by September 15, 2006. Our intent is that the Department will again conduct an initial review and advance acceptable proposals to a second peer review to take place in mid-October that will be organized solely for Oregon and the five other States who have advanced to this point in the process. If successful, Oregon's revised growth model could be approved for implementation for the 2006-07 school year. To help you with this effort, in addition to the information in this letter, I am

providing two pieces of information: 1) the peer report for Oregon; and 2) a document produced by the peer review team that outlines several general themes and cross-cutting concerns raised during the peer review, although not necessarily specific to Oregon's proposal. My staff and I are willing to discuss this information with you to help refine Oregon's proposal.

The peers identified several strengths in the Oregon proposal: the model was built upon an assessment that incorporates a vertical scale and it incorporates a proposed group size of 21 students with matched scores. However, the peers raised significant specific concerns regarding the Oregon proposal. (Please refer to the enclosed peer report for details.) The peers were particularly concerned about the use of the school-level growth calculation that combines the growth estimates of both low- and high-achieving students. In addition, the peers were concerned with the application of a wide confidence interval. Confidence intervals (e.g., 99 percent) are inappropriate in a growth model. Because a growth model measures the gains over time of individual students, it does not need to account for volatility due to changes in cohorts, such as may be the case with standard adequate yearly progress determinations.

In addition, the peers noted that Oregon has not put forth what the State plans on using as benchmarks for adequate growth and that Oregon intends to re-establish standards for grades 3–8 and high school after the initial year of the proposed growth model. The peers noted that the proposal would be strengthened if a procedure for ensuring the comparability of growth estimates between 2005–06 and beyond were identified. It is likely that the match rate (i.e., the percentage of students for which there are data available in the current and previous years) in Oregon varies considerably across schools, with some schools having relatively high proportions of students who will not be part of the school-level growth calculation; the proposal does not include a statistical adjustment for missing data. Consequently, in some schools an acceptable growth estimate may mask substantial school underperformance within subgroups. These and additional concerns are presented in the peer report that is enclosed.

If Oregon decides not to revise its current proposal based on this feedback and submit a revised proposal by September 15, please note that the Department would welcome a new proposal from Oregon along with other States later this year; these proposals would be due to us by November 1, 2006. The limit of approved plans through this pilot, however, will remain at ten.

The Department will rigorously evaluate the approved proposals, review information on how each pilot project is working, and share the results with other States, policymakers, and the public. With the knowledge gained from the approved growth models, the Department will be able to make an informed decision on whether to expand the pilot project beyond the 2006–07 school year.

Again, I appreciate your interest in the growth model pilot project and your continued efforts to ensure quality education for all children.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Henry L. Johnson". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Henry L. Johnson

Enclosures

cc: Governor Ted Kulongoski
Patrick Burk