

## **Committee on Education and Labor**

### **ESEA Reauthorization: Options for Improving NCLB's Measures of Progress**

**March 21, 2007**

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Chairman Miller, Ranking Member McKeon and members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify today about the implementation of growth models in accountability systems. My name is Valerie Woodruff. I am the Secretary of Education in the state of Delaware. I am the immediate Past President of the Council of Chief State School Officers.

I am proud to say that Delaware was among several states that had implemented a school and district accountability system to measure our progress in standards based reform prior to the passage of No Child Left Behind. We began assessing English language arts and mathematics in 1998. Based on the early information about the goals of NCLB, we applauded the initial work of Congress and believed that we could easily meet the requirements of the law. Our original accountability system included three measures of student performance: status, growth, and improvement of the lowest performing students. To our schools and to our community, these measures made sense and had what I refer to as "face validity." Simply stated, educators and others understood the value of measuring not only the change in performance of one cohort of students to another but also the change in performance of the same cohort of students over time. And certainly, they saw the value of attending to and measuring the improvement of our lowest performing students and of closing the achievement gap.

Delaware was the tenth state to receive approval of our accountability plan in the spring of 2003. Also, we were among the first states to receive full approval of our standards and assessments. Delaware implemented a unique student identifier in 1984 and has worked diligently and deliberately since that time to link student demographic data with achievement data. Given all these factors, we were anxious to engage the Department of Education and to convince them that the use of growth models was a natural progression in creating a mature accountability system.

When the Department allowed states to submit growth model proposals for the 2006 accountability measurement, we felt confident that our proposal would be approved. That did not occur, and we were perplexed at the feedback we received. It did not seem that the peer reviewers had clear guidance about the criteria, nor did they understand the different models that can be used to measure growth. We were required to make several changes in order to receive approval for the 2007 accountability year.

The model that we chose supports our philosophy of continuous improvement for all students. It is easy to explain and understand. It provides schools with information that shows which students are making progress toward proficiency, which students are maintaining proficiency, and which students are slipping backwards. It is not enough to measure the average performance of even a small cohort of students. Systems must focus on the performance of individual students and must provide schools with the appropriate incentives to address student needs.

Moving forward, the law should not only allow but also encourage the use of a variety of accountability models. These models should be focused on individual student achievement and build on adequate yearly progress (AYP) to promote more valid, reliable, and educationally meaningful accountability determinations. States must be encouraged to innovate and to seek new and better ways of supporting continuous student achievement.

Specifically, the Department of Education must establish clear and consistent policies and procedures that enable states to use growth models for accountability. It should articulate the foundation elements that a state needs to have in order to qualify to use a growth model. For example, a state must have a unique student identifier; approved standards and assessment systems; a data system that is able to collect and track individual student performance over time. When states have those elements in place, they should not have to guess at how their proposals will be judged.

The Department should clearly define what criteria must be contained in a growth model proposal, and they must select and train the peer reviewers so that states can be guaranteed fair and equitable reviews of all proposals regardless of the background or philosophical beliefs of the reviewers. The peer review process must be fully transparent and iterative and be focused on improving the quality of accountability systems, not limiting their scope and use.

In order for states to pursue stronger, more robust systems of accountability, a partnership of support and technical assistance must be in place. States need ongoing technical assistance in order to build a strong knowledge base about accountability models. They need to benefit from research about which models are most effective and why. They need continuing support in development and improvement of data systems. For instance, as strong as Delaware's data system is today, we can benefit from knowledge of cutting edge technology. All states are eager to learn more and to improve the quality of education for our children.

I appreciate the opportunity to address the committee today. Thank you for your leadership. I will be glad to respond to your questions.