



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY

The Honorable Tom Horne
Superintendent of Public Instruction
Arizona Department of Education
1535 West Jefferson Street, Bin Z
Phoenix, Arizona 85007

JAN 08 2009

Dear Superintendent Horne:

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 Arizona. 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 Arizona'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 Arizona'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 (LEP) 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 Arizona is participating in several of these endeavors.
 - Growth Model Pilot: The Department approved Arizona to use its growth model in making AYP determinations in July 2007 and on December 22, 2008 granted a four-year extension for use of the growth model through 2011-12

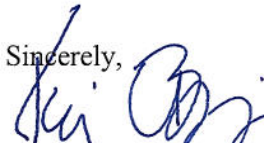
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The Department of Education's mission is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access.

- General Supervision Enhancement Grant: Arizona, in partnership with Vanderbilt University and the state of Indiana, received funds to work toward development of an alternate assessment based on modified academic achievement standards. (Year 1: \$799,999; Year 2: \$599,965; Year 3: \$599,911)
- Teacher Incentive Fund Grant: Project EXCELL! (11 high-needs schools in Amphitheater Unified School District #10); Total Amount: \$12,395,987; (Year 1: \$4,700,840; Year 2: \$7,695,147)
- Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems Grant: Arizona Education Data Warehouse; Amount: \$5,954,518

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 Arizona. 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 Janet Napolitano
Robert Franciosi

Assessment System

Your assessment system met the requirements to be considered *Fully Approved with Recommendations*. This means that Arizona's system includes academic content standards in reading/language arts, mathematics, and science; academic achievement standards in reading/language arts and mathematics; alternate achievement standards for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities in those subjects; assessments in each of grades 3 through 10 in reading/language arts and mathematics; and alternate assessments for each subject and meets all statutory and regulatory requirements.

- Arizona'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 the alternate); and report the results of the science assessments. Arizona met these requirements.
 - In 2008–09, the Department will conduct peer reviews of science assessments and expects the assessments to be fully compliant. Since Arizona has not brought in its science assessments for peer review to date, it must do so by March 2009 at the latest. Beginning with the 2008-09 school year, science assessments will be included in the states' assessment status. For additional details, 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): Arizona's minimum group size is 40. (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: Arizona's goals for this year are: 63 percent of grade 3, 56 percent of grade 4, 55 percent of grade 5, 56 percent of grade 6, 59 percent of grade 7, 54 percent of grade 8, and 49 percent of grade 10 students scoring proficient in reading/language arts and 55 percent of grade 3, 63 percent of grade 4, 47 percent of grade 5, 54 percent of grade 6, 58 percent of grade 7, 38 percent of grade 8, and 40 percent of grade 10 students scoring proficient in mathematics.
 - AMO type: Arizona set its AMOs consistent with the statutory requirements using a mixed method. This means Arizona's AMOs increased in three year increments through 2009–10 and then annually through 2013–14 to reach 100 percent proficiency.
- Confidence interval: The state applies a confidence interval of 99 percent to the percentage of students scoring proficient or above in the school.
- Full academic year definition (for purposes of determining whether a student's score must be included in AYP determinations): In Arizona, a student must be enrolled within the first two weeks of the school year and during the first day of administration of the AIMS in order to be included in AYP determinations.
- Graduation rate:
 - Currently, Arizona is using a graduation rate that can be described as a longitudinal cohort rate, which means that the cohort of students who graduated after four years is divided by the number of students in the original cohort plus transfers in, minus transfers out, minus deceased students.
 - 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 Arizona requires for the district or school to make AYP is 71 percent or 1 percent improvement over previous year.
- According to the National Governor's Association (NGA) 2008 report *Implementing Graduation Counts: State Progress to Date, 2008*, Arizona began reporting the four-year NGA Compact 4-year graduation rate in 2005.