

October 22, 2004

Dear Chief State School Officer:

At the heart of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) are the requirements that each State develop challenging academic content and student achievement standards in reading/language arts and mathematics and an aligned assessment system that measures student achievement towards meeting those standards in each of grades 3 through 8 and once in grades 10 through 12 by the 2005-2006 school year. In addition, each State must develop academic content standards in science by 2005-2006 and student achievement standards and aligned assessments in three grade spans by the 2007-2008 school year. I know your State has been working hard to implement these important provisions, and I very much appreciate those efforts.

Under section 1111(e) of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the Department of Education (ED) is required to peer review and approve each State system of standards and assessments, including evidence of how the State has met the relevant NCLB requirements. To ensure that each State meets these requirements by the statutory deadline, we will soon begin to peer review each State's standards and assessment system for compliance with the new NCLB requirements. I am writing to inform you of the process that we will use to peer review and approve your State's system.

Over the last few years, we have placed a great deal of emphasis on meeting the NCLB standards and assessments requirements. In turn, States have made significant progress towards meeting that milestone, starting with the submission of the June 2002 State Consolidated Application that included a timeline for adopting academic content standards or grade level expectations for reading/language arts and mathematics, developing related assessments, and setting academic achievement standards for those assessments.

ED activities over the last three years have been designed to help States prepare for the NCLB assessment reviews. With your peers' input, the standards and assessment regulations were finalized during July 2002 and shared with SEA and school district participants in four regional Title I conferences held during the fall of 2002. In 2003, ED developed guidance on standards and assessments requirements and shared them with SEA representatives at various meetings. In conjunction with the President's budget requests and priorities, ED has provided more than \$1 billion to States for use in developing State standards-based assessments that will meet NCLB requirements. For the 2005-06 school year, the President has proposed an additional \$410 million for States to continue developmental work on the required assessments.

In April 2004, we provided each State with our standards and assessment peer review guidance that will be used in each peer review. As that guidance indicates, the peer review will cover the following:

- Academic content standards or grade-level expectations in reading/language arts and mathematics in each of grades 3 through 8 and high school;
- Student academic achievement standards in reading/language arts and mathematics in each of grades 3 through 8 and high school;
- Alternate achievement standards, if any, in reading/language arts and mathematics for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities;
- Aligned assessments in reading/language arts and mathematics in each of grades 3 through 8 and once in grades 10 through 12;
- Alternate assessments aligned with grade-level achievement standards for students with disabilities;
- Alternate assessments, if any, aligned with alternate achievement standards for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities;
- Academic content standards in science in grade spans 3 through 5, 6 through 9, and 10 through 12; and
- Academic achievement levels and descriptions in science in three grade spans (but not “cut scores”).

The peer review guidance elaborates on the specific elements applicable to each of these pieces of a State’s standards and assessment system and includes examples of acceptable evidence to demonstrate compliance. A State is not required to submit its actual standards or assessments for peer review. Rather, you must submit evidence that your standards and assessment system meets the applicable statutory and regulatory requirements. I urge you to review the peer review guidance carefully and to organize your submission of evidence in accordance with it. Evidence of meeting the NCLB science assessment requirements may also be submitted for review, although States are not required to meet the science assessment requirements until the 2007-2008 school year.

The process of peer reviewing State evidence for compliance with the NCLB standards and assessment requirements will begin this Fall. As noted in a previous email, we will host a meeting of State assessment directors, Title I directors, Title III directors, and special education directors in Washington, DC, on November 8<sup>th</sup> to provide an overview of the peer review guidance and to share the process for the reviews and critical dates. The Department will contact your State Assessment Director, coordinate his or her travel and lodging arrangements, and pay for those expenses. Since the implementation of the NCLB system of standards and assessments must also address issues of inclusion for special education, limited English proficient and economically disadvantaged students, I am strongly encouraging each State to send representatives from those areas (e.g., Title I) to the meeting as well. These individuals may use administrative funds from those federal grant programs to cover their expenses.

We have reserved a block of rooms at the Holiday Inn – Washington Capitol (across the street from the meeting site). Each participant (other than the State Assessment director) should directly contact the Holiday Inn (202 479-4000) and make room reservations at the \$153/night rate under the U.S. Department of Education Peer Review block of rooms. The block of rooms will be held until October 29, 2004. A copy of the agenda for the November 8 meeting is attached to this letter.

The location of this event enables each State to bring four individuals (including the State Assessment Director); if your State needs to send more than four people, please contact us and we will try to make arrangements for you. Another option is for State personnel who are unable to attend the Washington DC meeting, to participate in the Web-based conference regarding the peer review process. The date for this web-based conference will be announced later.

#### Peer Review Timeline

There will be several opportunities for your State to submit evidence of its standards and assessment system for peer review. The first review will occur December 1-3, 2004. Subsequent reviews will occur several times during 2005 and 2006.

Please do not delay in scheduling the peer review of your State's standards and assessment system. As you consider when to undergo peer review, please consider that participating in an earlier review will provide valuable feedback and allow time for any needed adjustments prior to administering your assessment system. As noted above, NCLB requires each State to *administer*, in the 2005-2006 school year, an assessment system that fully meets the NCLB requirements.

Additional summary information regarding the peer review and approval process for NCLB standards and assessments is enclosed. Please contact members of my staff, Dr. Kerri Briggs (202 401-0113) or Dr. Zollie Stevenson, Jr. (202 260-1824) if you have any specific questions regarding the plans or process for peer review.

Sincerely,

Raymond Simon

Enclosure

cc: State Assessment Directors  
State Title I Directors  
State Title III Directors  
State Special Education Directors  
Governors

Enclosure

## **The Peer Review Process**

To determine whether States have met the new NCLB standards and assessment requirements, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) will use a peer review process involving experts in the fields of standards and assessments. The review will evaluate States' standards and assessment systems only against NCLB requirements. In other words, reviewers will examine characteristics of a State's assessment system that will be used to hold schools and school districts accountable under NCLB.

The peer review process will not directly examine a State's academic standards, assessment instruments, or specific test items. Rather, it will examine *evidence* compiled and submitted by each State that is intended to show that the assessment system as implemented meets NCLB requirements. Such evidence may include, but is not limited to, results from alignment studies; results from validation studies; written policies on providing accommodations for students with disabilities and LEP students; written policies on native-language testing of LEP students (if applicable); and score reports showing disaggregation of student achievement data by the statutorily specified student subgroups. Sufficient evidence must be provided to convince an experienced professional that the assessment system can be implemented in a manner that meets NCLB requirements.

Peer reviewers will advise the Department on whether the evidence provides compelling evidence that the assessment system is consistent with NCLB requirements based on the totality of evidence submitted. Peer reviewers will also provide constructive feedback to help States strengthen their assessment systems. The guidance that informs this process may be found at the following website: <http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/saaprguidance.doc>

## **Review Process**

**State evidence submissions must be received three weeks in advance of the peer review date.** ED staff will send the materials provided by a State to each member of the peer review team in advance of the scheduled peer review to allow for a thorough independent review based on the peer review guidance. At the peer review, a team of at least three peer reviewers will discuss the State's system, as represented by the evidence provided by the State, and record a consensus opinion.

Approximately 2.5 days will be allocated to each State for review of documents, deliberations and the preparation of a consensus opinion.

## **Review Teams**

Each peer review team will prepare a consensus opinion based on its examination of the evidence submitted by a State. In each team, one person will be designated the team leader; this

person will be responsible for seeing that consensus notes are clear, complete, and delivered to ED staff at the end of the peer review.

An ED staff person, assigned as a resource to each team, will be responsible for assisting the review team in obtaining appropriate information from the State prior to the review meeting, contacting the State during the review meeting to obtain clarification or additional information needed by the reviewers, securing resources needed to support the team during the meeting, and accurately reporting the review team's deliberations as ED determines the State's status.

**Preparing for the Peer Review of the State Assessment System under NCLB  
State Advisory Meeting – DRAFT AGENDA  
November 8, 2004**

Time	Activity
9:00-9:30	Welcome Introductions Meeting Overview
9:30-10:45	Key Issues Regarding the Review Process <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer Review Process: explanation of feedback the State will receive and when it will be provided</li> <li>• Approval results and implications for early review</li> <li>• Guidance document with emphasis on alternate achievement standards. Will discuss criteria for approval of grade-level and alternate achievement standards</li> </ul>
10:45-11:00	Break
11:00-12:00	Preparing State Submission <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Show several IASA submissions</li> <li>• Strengths and weaknesses</li> <li>• Dates for review</li> <li>• Integrating new tests and evidence with old</li> </ul>
12:00-1:00	Lunch
1:00-2:30	Questions and Issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitated Break out groups – Each group will deal with one section of the guidance.</li> </ul>

Time	Activity
2:30-2:45	Break
2:45-3:30	<p>Action Planning for State</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying State leader for preparing review materials</li> <li>• Identifying needed materials and owner of materials</li> <li>• Determining a review date</li> </ul> <p>Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CCSSO/Technical Issues in Large Scale Assessment alignment tool</li> <li>• Role of State Technical Advisory Committee (notes as evidence)</li> <li>• Sample Table of Contents for a technical quality manual</li> <li>• Peer Review Guidance document reformatted as state outline of evidence</li> </ul>
3:30-4:00	Wrap up: Large Group Question and Answer Session