



# UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY

**JAN 15 2009**

The Honorable Kathy Cox  
State Superintendent of Schools  
Georgia Department of Education  
2062 Twin Towers East  
Atlanta, Georgia 30334

Dear Superintendent Cox:

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 Georgia. 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 Georgia'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 rate 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 Georgia'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 (LEP), 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 Georgia is participating in several of these endeavors.
  - Differentiated Accountability Pilot: The Department approved Georgia in August 2008 to include its differentiated accountability model as part of its system of interventions beginning in the 2008-09 school year through the 2011-12 school year. Through this pilot, Georgia has also been

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- 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.
- Enhance Assessment Grant: Georgia, in partnership with Hawaii and Kentucky as part of the Georgia Consortium, received funds in fiscal year 2005 for the *Assessing One and All: A Partnership for Success* project. This project aims to explore and document effects of multiple methods of assessments that meet identified student needs to ensure all children are able to show what they know in the grade-level standards-based curriculum. Amount: \$1,153,899
  - General Supervision Enhancement Grant:
    - Georgia, in partnership with the University of Kentucky, Kentucky, Connecticut, and the District of Columbia, received funds to work toward development of an alternate assessment based on alternate academic achievement standards. (Year 1: \$1,999,997; Year 2: \$1,499,997; Year 3: \$1,499,997)
    - Georgia received funds to work toward development of an alternate assessment based on modified academic achievement standards (AA-MAAS). (Year 1: \$400,000; Year 2: \$300,000; Year 3: \$300,000)
  - Two percent transition flexibility for states developing an AA-MAAS: Georgia was approved in 2007–08 to include a proxy calculation for any school or district that did not make AYP due to the students with disabilities subgroup in grades 3–8. Georgia is eligible for this flexibility because it is developing an AA-MAAS for certain students with disabilities.
- Georgia-specific issues: Finally, I'd like to take this opportunity to remind you of recent concerns that we have raised. Georgia was one day late with AYP determinations in 2008. Providing timely notification to local educational agencies (LEAs) and the public is a vital component of a meaningful accountability system and ensures parents have full knowledge of their options as soon as possible regarding public school choice and supplemental educational services. Please note that the recently issued Title I regulations require an LEA to notify parents of their choice options sufficiently in advance of, but no later than 14 calendar days before, the start of school. To meet this requirement, an LEA must have timely notice from the state of whether its schools have made AYP.

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 Georgia. 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 Sonny Perdue  
 Jeff Gagne  
 Melissa Fincher

## Assessment System

Your assessment system met the requirements to be considered *Fully Approved*. This means Georgia's system includes the administration of grade-level assessments and the Georgia Alternate Assessment (GAA), an alternate assessment based on alternate academic achievement standards, in each of grades 3-8 and high school in reading/language arts and mathematics and meets all statutory and regulatory requirements. I encourage you to consider whether there are any areas in which the Department can provide or facilitate technical assistance to Georgia as you consider changes to your current assessment system.

- Georgia'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 alternate); and report the results of the science assessments. Georgia met these requirements.
  - In 2008–09, the Department will conduct peer reviews of science assessments and expects the assessments to be fully compliant. I know that Georgia submitted evidence regarding the science assessments for peer review and will be receiving feedback shortly. 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): Georgia's minimum group size is the greater of 40 or 10 percent (up to 75). (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: Georgia's goal for this year is 73 and 88 percent of grades 3-8 and high school students, respectively, scoring proficient in reading/language arts and 67 and 75 percent of grades 3-8 and high school students, respectively, scoring proficient in mathematics.
  - AMO type: Georgia set its AMOs consistent with the statutory requirements, using a mixed method. This means that Georgia's AMO's first increased after two years, then in three-year increments through 2010–211, then yearly through 2013–14 to reach 100 percent proficiency.
- Confidence interval: The state applies a confidence interval of .95 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 Georgia, a student must be enrolled continuously from the fall full time enrollment count through the state's spring testing window in order to be included in AYP determinations.
- Graduation rate:
  - Currently, Georgia is using a graduation rate that can be described as a completer rate, which means that the number of graduates is divided by the number of graduates plus dropouts from each of the previous four years.
  - 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 Georgia requires for the district or school to make AYP is 75 percent or meeting the target using a three-year average or making a 10 percent increase from the previous year, provided it meets the minimum threshold.
  - According to the National Governor's Association (NGA) 2008 report *Implementing Graduation Counts: State Progress to Date, 2008*, Georgia is "taking steps to implement the NGA Compact 4-year graduation rate by 2009."