



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY

JUL 1 2008

The Honorable Tim Webb  
Interim Commissioner of Education  
Tennessee Department of Education  
Sixth Floor, Andrew Johnson Tower  
710 James Robertson Parkway  
Nashville, Tennessee 37243-0375

Dear Commissioner Webb:

Thank you for submitting a proposal for the U.S. Department of Education's (Department) differentiated accountability pilot. I appreciate the work you and your staff have done to try to develop a more nuanced way of distinguishing between schools and districts in need of intensive intervention and those that are closer to reaching their goals.

As you know, the Department forwarded Tennessee's differentiated accountability proposal to a group of outside peer reviewers who evaluated each proposal to determine whether it was technically sound and consistent with the core principles of the pilot. The peers identified several strengths in Tennessee's proposal, including Tennessee's use of its growth model, the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS), as a method of differentiation. However, the peers also raised significant specific concerns regarding Tennessee's proposal. In particular, the peers were concerned about the fact that the growth model is less reliable for non-proficient students than it is for proficient students. They were also troubled by the proposal to limit the availability of public school choice and supplemental educational services to specific subgroups that did not make adequate yearly progress. Finally, the peers expressed concerns over the lack of interventions, such as the hiring of outside consultants, which target all persistently low-performing groups. Based on the peers' concerns and the Department's own analysis of Tennessee's proposal, the Department is not approving Tennessee to participate in the differentiated accountability pilot at this time.

In the fall, the Department will once again invite any interested state to submit a proposal to participate in the differentiated accountability pilot for 2009–10 based on assessments administered in 2008–09. Details about the timing of this review are forthcoming. I encourage Tennessee to submit a revised proposal so that it may be considered for participation in the pilot in 2009–10. To aid you in this effort, I am enclosing a copy of the peer report regarding Tennessee's proposal as well as a memorandum prepared by the peer reviewers that discusses some of the overarching issues the peers identified during their review of all of the proposals that were submitted for the pilot. Additionally, the Department will be hosting a roundtable later this summer to discuss methods of differentiation and evaluation, and I encourage you to participate in that discussion. Please note that the Department intends to continue to limit participation in the pilot to ten states. Accordingly, I encourage you to review the peers' report and

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memorandum carefully, and to contact my staff so that we may discuss ways you may be able to refine Tennessee's proposal.

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

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Kerri Briggs".

Kerri L. Briggs, Ph.D.

Enclosures

cc: Governor Phil Bredesen  
Connie Smith