



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY

JAN 8 2009

The Honorable Jim McBride
State Superintendent of Public Instruction
Wyoming Department of Education
2300 Capitol Ave, 2nd Floor
Hathaway Building
Cheyenne, Wyoming 82002-0050

Dear Superintendent McBride:

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 Wyoming. 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. 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 Wyoming'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, and discretionary grant programs, such as the Teacher Incentive Fund, Enhanced Assessment Grants, and State Longitudinal Data System Grants. Wyoming is not currently participating in any of these endeavors.

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 Wyoming. NCLB has focused our attention on closing achievement gaps and increasing the awareness of those students who

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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 Dave Freudenthal
Laurel Ballard

Assessment System

Your assessment system is currently *Approval Pending*. This means that Wyoming does not fully meet requirements for an assessment system that includes assessments in grades 3-8 and high school in reading/language arts and mathematics. I encourage you to consider whether there are any areas in which the Department can provide or facilitate technical assistance to Wyoming in meeting the statutory or regulatory requirements or as you consider changes to your current assessment system.

- Wyoming'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 and alternate); and report the results of the science assessments. Wyoming appears to have met these requirements.
 - Beginning with the 2008-09 school year, science assessments will be included in the states' assessment status. For additional detail, please see the enclosed fact sheet.
- I know that Wyoming submitted evidence regarding your general and alternate science assessments for review from October 25 through November 2. My staff will be sharing the peer notes and formal feedback as soon as possible.

Accountability System

- Minimum group size (the state-defined minimum number of students necessary to have valid and reliable AYP determinations): Wyoming's minimum group size is 30. (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: Wyoming's goal for this year is 54 percent of students scoring proficient in grades 3-5, 56 percent in grades 6-8, and 66 percent in grade 11 in reading/language arts and 49 percent for grades 3-5, 50 percent for grades 6-8, and 57 percent for grade 11 in mathematics.
 - AMO type: Wyoming set its AMOs consistent with the statutory requirements, using a mixed method. This means that Wyoming's AMOs first increased after three years, then two years, then annually beginning in 2010–2011 through 2013–2014 to reach 100 percent proficient.
- Confidence interval: Wyoming uses a confidence interval of 95 percent.
- Full academic year definition (for purposes of determining whether a student's score must be included in AYP determinations): In Wyoming, a student must be enrolled from October 1st to the 15th day of the testing window in order to be included in AYP determinations.
- Graduation rate:
 - Currently, Wyoming is using a graduation rate that can be described as a completer rate. Wyoming divides the number of graduates by the number of graduates plus the 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 Wyoming requires for the district or school to make AYP is 80 percent or some improvement from the previous year.
 - According to the National Governor's Association 2008 report *Implementing Graduation Counts: State Progress to Date, 2008*, Wyoming will be able to report the NGA Compact 4-year graduation rate in 2011.

SUMMARY OF ADDITIONAL EVIDENCE THAT WYOMING MUST SUBMIT TO MEET ESEA REQUIREMENTS FOR THE WYOMING ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

2.0 - ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT STANDARDS

1. Confirmation that the PAWS-Alt is administered as intended, e.g. number and percent of non-scoreable components.
2. The scoring rubrics for all three PAWS-Alt components: the Data Collection Form (DCF), the Teacher Observation of Academic Skills (TOAS), and the Student Performance Events (SPE). The DCF rubric was provided but the scoring criteria for TOAS and SPE components were not.
3. Training materials for the accurate administration, scoring, and interpretation of results from the PAWS-Alt.
4. A description of the standards-setting process for the PAWS-Alt that includes documentation of the procedures employed, including:
 - a. The standards-setting model;
 - b. The materials used to train the panelists;
 - c. The rationale and procedures for selecting student work samples;
 - d. A sample student profile as used by the panelists; and
 - e. The numerical information used to summarize the contents of the student profiles used for standard setting.
 - f. An explanation of how variation in student profiles was considered in setting performance standards and drafting the final performance descriptors.

4.0 - TECHNICAL QUALITY

1. Evidence of technical quality for PAWS to address the reviewers' concerns regarding:
 - a. Procedures for the development of test forms appropriate for the design and intended purpose (reading, writing, and mathematics);
 - b. Stability of results from multiple forms within year (split-half option) and across time (reading, writing, and mathematics);
 - c. Consistency between test administration practices and the standards-setting process (reading, writing, and mathematics);
 - d. Clear blueprints, item specifications, and test development procedures for 2006-07 (reading and writing);
 - e. Implementation of a writing scale that combines with reading scale scores to form a combined English/language arts score for accountability; and
 - f. Implementation of sound scaling and equating procedures across test forms and years.
2. Implementation of sound scaling and equating procedures across test forms and years.
3. Evidence of technical quality for PAWS-Alt to address the reviewers' concerns regarding:
 - a. Clear explanations of design and scoring;
 - b. Documentation of scoring reliability (consistency and accuracy);
 - c. Justification of score use given the threat to validity represented by the inter-component correlations that show higher correlations between content areas than between components within content areas;
 - d. The low percentage of items related to assessment targets; and
 - e. Data discrepancies within and between successive versions of the Technical Reports.
 - f. Complete validity information for the operational PAWS and reliability and validity information for the PAWS-Alt assessments, including data supporting concurrent and consequential validity.

- g. Data confirming that the accommodations permitted on the PAWS assessment support valid use of the assessment results.
- h. A plan and commitment for ongoing analysis of the relation between test administration patterns (split-half option), test results and the implications for interpretation, and intended consequences.

5.0 - ALIGNMENT

1. The systematic procedures that will be used to address the alignment gaps documented in the ELY alignment study and the concerns about alignment stated in the technical manual.
2. Test blueprints or other documents that show alignment of the PAWS with the content standards rather than "skills."
3. Clarification regarding the design and administration of the operational PAWS-Alt sufficient to determine whether the assessment content is aligned with grade-level content standards.

6.0 - INCLUSION

1. Official grade-by grade enrollment data (either for spring 2006 or for the date of enrollment that is used by Wyoming to calculate the participation rate for adequate yearly progress determinations) for all students. This should include official State assessment reports for the assessments administered in 2006-07 that display the number of students with disabilities tested on PAWS and PAWS-Alt.

SUMMARY OF ADDITIONAL EVIDENCE THAT WYOMING MUST SUBMIT TO MEET ESEA REQUIREMENTS FOR WYOMING'S SCIENCE STANDARDS AND ASSESSMENTS

2.0 - ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT STANDARDS

1. Evidence of final adoption of cut scores for the PAWS and the PAWS-Alt.
2. Final achievement level descriptors that differentiate across grade spans and that are content specific.
3. Evidence of alternate academic achievement standards, descriptors, and cut scores for the PAWS-Alt.
4. Evidence demonstrating how the state ensures that parents are informed that students are participating in the PAWS-Alt, along with evidence of how the state ensures that parents are informed of the implications of that participation.
5. Documentation of the number and percentage of students with disabilities enrolled, the number and percentage assessed on the PAWS-Alt, and the number and percentage assessed on PAWS, either with or without accommodations.
6. Evidence of diverse stakeholders' representation in the standards-setting process in June 2008, including participants' demographic information, such as content area knowledge, special expertise (i.e., limited English proficient students and students with disabilities), and grade taught.

3.0 - FULL ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

1. Evidence of alignment for the PAWS and PAWS-Alt. [Evidence submitted for element 5 will satisfy this concern.]

4.0 - TECHNICAL QUALITY

1. Documentation of a final, comprehensive technical manual that addresses the critical elements contained within this section.
2. Plans for examining intended and unintended consequences.
3. Evidence of the methodology and plan for demonstrating the reliability of the PAWS-Alt, particularly the Portfolio of Student Work (PSW) component.
4. Documentation of the monitoring system.
5. Plans for analyses that evaluate the use of accommodations.
6. Evidence of an overarching framework and management plan that ensures critical components of the assessment system are operating in a coherent manner, thus establishing evidence that operational forms are developed in a consistent manner from one assessment cycle to another; alignment results are integrated within the upcoming assessment cycle; monitoring the intended implementation of the assessments, including the appropriate use of accommodations, provides feedback to state and school officials; and evaluations of intended and unintended consequences produced by the implementation of the assessment system are used to improve overall system quality.

5.0 - ALIGNMENT

1. Evidence of the alignment study and a plan to address any findings from that study.
2. Evidence of a plan to address any alignment deficiencies noted in the study and ensure alignment over time.
3. Evidence that the state's alternate academic achievement standards are aligned with the state's academic content standards.

6.0 - INCLUSION

1. Data demonstrating that all students are included in the science PAWS and PAWS-Alt assessments.
2. Evidence to address the consistency and accuracy of assessment translations provided for limited English proficient (LEP) students in their native language(s).

7.0 - REPORTING

1. Documentation of PAWS-Alt reports and interpretative guides which demonstrates and/or explains performance level scale scores, the use of an error bands, and the elimination of non-essential technical terms.
2. Evidence of revised PAWS reports and interpretative guides which demonstrates and/or explains performance level scale scores, the use of an error bands, and the elimination of non-essential technical terms.
3. Documentation that districts provide all necessary information in reports to parents.
4. Evidence of the timeframe for the districts to deliver reports to parents.