

IMPROVEMENTS MADE BY TENNESSEE TO ITS ESEA FLEXIBILITY REQUEST

Based on feedback from peer reviewers and U.S. Department of Education staff, Tennessee made the following changes to its original request in order to meet the principles of ESEA flexibility.

PRINCIPLE 1: COLLEGE- AND CAREER-READY EXPECTATIONS FOR ALL STUDENTS

- Tennessee provided additional evidence to show that English Learners have access to the full range and depth of coursework provided in Tennessee schools and that the State will use assessment accommodations so that English Learners can effectively demonstrate what they know and are able to do.

PRINCIPLE 2: STATE-DEVELOPED SYSTEM OF DIFFERENTIATED RECOGNITION, ACCOUNTABILITY AND SUPPORT

- Tennessee addressed concern about potentially allowing districts and schools to adopt lower performance targets than those set by the State by (1) indicating that a similar goal-setting process had worked well under its Race to the Top plan; (2) explaining that lower targets could be set only for a compelling reason, must be high enough to allow the State to meet its targets, and would be subject to State approval; and (3) agreeing to report all district and school targets to the Department, which will allow for Department review to ensure that targets are ambitious but achievable.
- Tennessee made several significant changes to ensure meaningful subgroup accountability, including (1) requiring aggressive corrective action for any district or school in which an individual subgroup does not make progress on a majority of measures; (2) demonstrating that its gap closure targets are rigorous (based on data from the 2010–2011 school year, 105 of 135 districts would be identified); (3) adding graduation rate targets for subgroups; and (4) committing to raise over time the performance threshold that triggers focus school identification based on the low performance of a single subgroup (in addition to continuing to identify schools with the largest achievement gaps).
- Tennessee provided an assurance that the priority school interventions would be aligned with the turnaround principles and implemented for a minimum of three years.
- Tennessee provided an assurance that it would implement required focus school interventions by the beginning of the 2012–2013 school year and modified its focus school exit criteria to clarify that a school may not exit focus status if it fails to make progress in the achievement of the subgroup or subgroups of students which led to its initial identification.

PRINCIPLE 3: SUPPORTING EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTION AND LEADERSHIP

- Tennessee described how the performance of English Learners and students with disabilities counts in its teacher evaluation system by (1) highlighting the measures used to evaluate teacher performance; (2) describing how teachers consider students' unique learning needs and adjust instruction to meet those needs; and (3) emphasizing that the State was continuing to assess and strengthen requirements in this area.