UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

JUL - 9 2015

The Honorable Molly M. Spearman
State Superintendent of Education
South Carolina Department of Education
1429 Senate Street
Columbia, SC 29201

Dear Superintendent Spearman:

I am writing in response to South Carolina's request for renewal of flexibility under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended (ESEA flexibility), so that South Carolina may continue to implement ESEA flexibility.

Our team, including my staff and other senior leaders at the U.S. Department of Education (ED), reviewed South Carolina's request dated June 30, 2015. Pursuant to section 9401(d)(2) of the ESEA, I am pleased to renew approval of South Carolina's ESEA flexibility request for three years, through the end of the 2017–2018 school year.

My decision to renew approval of South Carolina's ESEA flexibility request is based on my determination that ESEA flexibility has been effective in enabling South Carolina to carry out important reforms to improve student achievement and that this renewal is in the public interest. With this renewal, South Carolina will be able to continue implementing its plans to promote innovative, locally tailored strategies to improve educational outcomes for all students, close achievement gaps, increase equity, and improve the quality of instruction. South Carolina's approved request will be posted on ED's website.

This letter also provides my approval of South Carolina's proposed amendments to its ESEA flexibility request. A summary of South Carolina's significant approved amendments is enclosed with this letter.

This renewal is subject to South Carolina's commitment to:

- Demonstrate, during ED's monitoring and follow-up of ESEA flexibility implementation, that South Carolina is implementing the high-quality plan set forth in its ESEA flexibility request, including timeline and milestones, that will lead to implementation of high-quality statewide assessments in reading/language arts and mathematics that are aligned to its college- and career-ready standards in the 2015–2016 school year and beyond; and

- Demonstrate, during ED's monitoring and follow-up of ESEA flexibility implementation, that South Carolina is implementing the plan set forth in its ESEA flexibility request, including timeline and milestones, that will lead to inclusion of student growth in its teacher and principal

evaluation and support systems based on student performance data and State assessments administered no later than the 2016–2017 school year and each year thereafter.

South Carolina continues to have an affirmative responsibility to ensure that it and its local educational agencies (LEAs) are in compliance with Federal civil rights laws that prohibit discrimination based on race, color, national origin, sex, disability, and age in their implementation of ESEA flexibility. These laws include Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, and requirements under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

I am confident that South Carolina will continue to implement the reforms described in its approved ESEA flexibility request and advance its efforts to hold schools and LEAs accountable for the achievement of all students. If you need any additional assistance to implement your ESEA flexibility request, please do not hesitate to contact Porscheoy Brice or Erin Shackel of my staff at: OSS.SouthCarolina@ed.gov.

Thank you for your commitment and continued focus on enhancing education for all of South Carolina's students.

Sincerely,

Heather Rieman

Heather Rieman
Acting Assistant Secretary

Enclosure

cc: Karla Hawkins, South Carolina Department of Education
Elizabeth Carpentier, South Carolina Department of Education

Approved Amendments to South Carolina's ESEA Flexibility Request

The following is a summary of significant amendments that South Carolina included as part of its request for renewal of ESEA flexibility. ED approves these amendments because South Carolina's ESEA flexibility request, as amended, continues to be aligned with the principles of ESEA flexibility. Please refer to ED's website (http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/esea-flexibility/map/sc.html) for South Carolina's complete ESEA flexibility request.

- **Transition to College- and Career-Ready Standards ELA & Mathematics (Principle 1)**

  Revision: South Carolina amended its request to select Principle 1.A, Option B, indicating that it has adopted the South Carolina College- and Career-Ready Standards, which are college- and career-ready standards for English language arts (ELA) and mathematics that have been approved and certified by a State network of institutions of higher education, and that it will implement those standards beginning with the 2015–2016 school year. Consistent with Principle 1.A, Option B, South Carolina submitted the requisite evidence and attachments.

  Revision: South Carolina submitted a high-quality plan for how it will administer high-quality assessments aligned with the South Carolina College- and Career-Ready Standards in the 2015–2016 school year.

- **Transition to College- and Career-Ready Standards ESOL (Principle 1)**

  Revision: South Carolina will engage in a process to ensure that the State's English language proficiency (ELP) (i.e., English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)) standards are aligned to the South Carolina College- and Career-Ready Standards in the 2015–2016 school year. South Carolina will also issue a Request For Proposals (RFP) for an ELP (i.e., ELL) assessment for the 2015–2016 school year that is aligned to the new ELP standards. The RFP will be written for assessments to align with the South Carolina College- and Career-Ready Standards.

- **State–Developed Differentiated Recognition, Accountability, and Support (Principle 2)**

  Revision: South Carolina will not assign new ratings for schools and districts under the State's system of differentiated recognition, accountability, and support based on assessments administered in the 2014–2015 school year. South Carolina will resume assigning ratings based on assessments administered in the 2015–2016 school year.

  Revision: A school may exit priority status after receiving services for a minimum of three consecutive years, when it no longer falls within five percent of the lowest-performing Title I schools, when it meets the pre-determined outcomes of its most current Challenge to Achieve (CTA) plan, and when it is able to provide an explanation of the

strategies used to achieve gains, as well as how these strategies will be sustained in the future.

Revision: A school may exit Focus school status when it meets the pre-determined outcomes of its CTA plan. A school may only exit if it is able to provide an explanation of the strategies used to achieve gains, as well as how those strategies will be sustained in the future. A school will receive two years of service to ensure sustainability of changes and improvement. Services provided through participation in the Office of School Transformation's annual School Improvement Planning Cycle will be differentiated as "intensive" and "follow-up" services.