

Dear Chief State School Officer:

Under your leadership, America's schools and classrooms are undergoing some of the largest changes in decades – changes that will help prepare our students with the critical thinking and problem-solving skills that tomorrow's economy will require. To support this transformational work, flexibility from the one-size-fits-all approach of No Child Left Behind has allowed States the ability to design meaningful systems of support and accountability to improve outcomes for all students. Your leadership has been instrumental in changing the landscape of education in your State and, collectively, across our country.

The 2014-15 school year is an important one as we continue an essential but complex transition period. Most States will be fully implementing new, rigorous academic standards while also transitioning to new State assessments and implementing educator evaluation and support systems. We continue to hear from educators— just as you do – about the importance of ensuring this transition occurs in a thoughtful and strategic manner. Thus, I am writing to inform you of an important new element of flexibility we will offer States based on your experiences in implementation.

In your requests for ESEA flexibility, SEAs committed to implement teacher and principal evaluation and support systems that use multiple measures of performance including student growth based on State assessments as a significant factor. Strong evaluation and support systems guide teachers and principals in their work, provide more meaningful information about their effectiveness, and are useful for informing professional development, improving practices, and recognizing excellence. Including student growth in those systems is critical, because ensuring that students gain the knowledge and skills they need to succeed is vital.

All SEAs that are currently approved for ESEA flexibility are moving forward on this important work, as are LEAs. Many States, despite challenging political and financial environments, have met their timelines and are already fully implementing these systems, or are on track to do so this school year. We applaud the hard work those leading States have done and continue to do and will reward their timely progress by making them eligible for longer renewals of ESEA flexibility waivers and an expedited renewal process.

However, the U.S. Department of Education (Department) also recognizes that building these systems is complex and that effectively implementing them can pose challenges. As this work has evolved, although they have the necessary authority to implement the systems fully, many SEAs have indicated a need for additional time to incorporate student growth based on State assessments into educator ratings for teachers and principals of tested grades and subjects during the transition to new assessments in 2014–2015. Still, other SEAs have informed the Department that they need to modify their implementation plans in other ways due to lessons learned or challenges facing their LEAs. The Department has heard those concerns, and will grant the following additional flexibilities to individual States that need them:

- **SEAs that need flexibility to delay inclusion of student growth on State assessments in evaluation and support systems during the transition to new assessments aligned with college- and career- ready standards.** The Department is offering SEAs

transitioning to new assessments the flexibility of additional time to incorporate student growth on State assessments for one year, during the transition to new assessments, which most States plan for 2014-2015. This flexibility is available if the SEA provides two assurances:

1. In addition to continuing to implement their educator evaluation systems using multiple measures of student growth, the SEA or its LEAs will calculate student growth data based on State assessments during the transition year for all teachers of tested grades and subjects, in order to ensure and improve SEA and/or LEA capacity to make these calculations in an accurate manner going forward; and
 2. Each teacher of a tested grade and subject and all principals will receive their student growth data based on State assessments for the 2014-2015 school year in order to provide educators with all available information and build a deeper understanding of the information and its uses.
- **SEAs that need other implementation flexibility for teacher and principal evaluation and support systems.** Some SEAs have requested other modifications to their teacher and principal evaluation and support systems that are different than their original flexibility plans. These changes will be considered on a State-by-State basis when the Department considers requests for renewal of ESEA flexibility beyond the 2014-2015 school year. SEAs requesting this implementation flexibility will be asked to explain in their request for renewal: (1) the progress made to date in ensuring that each LEA is on track to implement high quality teacher and principal evaluation and support systems designed to improve instruction; (2) the rationale for the proposed change(s); and (3) the steps the SEA will take to ensure continuous improvement of systems that result in instructional improvement and enhanced student learning.

The assurances are critical to ensure that States continue to make progress during this time of transition. SEAs interested in the flexibility described above will need to submit the relevant requests for flexibility, assurances or explanations discussed above to be eligible for renewal of ESEA flexibility beyond the 2014-2015 school year (guidance to be issued Fall 2014). However, during this school year, they may implement their systems as described in their current ESEA flexibility request.

We look forward to working with you and your staff to implement the reforms proposed under your approved ESEA flexibility request. If you have additional questions about this new flexibility, or any other aspect of your ESEA flexibility request, please do not hesitate to contact Dr. Monique M. Chism, Director, Student Achievement and School Accountability Programs, at Monique.Chism@ed.gov or your ESEA flexibility State contact. We appreciate all you are doing to enhance achievement for all students and to support educators in their important work.

Sincerely,

Deborah S. Delisle
Assistant Secretary