



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY

**AUG 29 2012**

The Honorable Patricia I. Wright  
Superintendent of Public Instruction  
Virginia Department of Education  
P.O. Box 2120  
Richmond, Virginia 23218

Dear Superintendent Wright:

This letter serves as a follow up to the conversations that my staff and I have had with you and your staff over the past few weeks regarding the annual measurable objectives (AMOs) that the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) set under its approved Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) flexibility request. First, let me begin by applauding Virginia's hard work and commitment to implementing college- and career-ready standards for all students. By implementing more rigorous assessments in mathematics and reading beginning in the 2011-2012 and 2012-2013, respectively, and resetting AMOs based on those assessments, Virginia is taking meaningful steps to ensure that the State, local educational agencies (LEA) and schools are accountable for helping them reach those standards.

As you are aware, ESEA flexibility permits a State educational agency (SEA) to set new ambitious but achievable AMOs that provide meaningful goals and are used to guide support and improvement efforts. Under ESEA flexibility, an SEA may set AMOs that differ by local educational agency (LEA), school, or subgroup, as long as the AMOs require LEAs, schools, and subgroups that are further behind to make greater rates of progress.

When the U.S. Department of Education (Department) approved VDOE's request for ESEA flexibility, it approved the VDOE's methodology for setting AMOs with the understanding that, although the AMOs could not be calculated until the State finalized scores for its new, more rigorous assessments, the resulting AMOs would require greater progress for subgroups that are further behind. However, when applied to the results of the State's more rigorous mathematics assessment, VDOE's methodology resulted in AMOs that require similar rates of progress for all subgroups—both those that are further behind and those that are higher achieving. Now that the impact of the new assessment data on the AMOs is fully understood, the Department, the VDOE, and the Virginia State Board of Education (VSBE) President David M. Foster agree that Virginia's approved methodology must be revised. We appreciate Virginia's collaboration in this area and willingness to address this issue.

Based on our phone call on August 28, 2012, we understand that the VDOE has identified an alternate methodology that will result in AMOs that require subgroups that are further behind to make greater rates of progress. We further understand that the VDOE will bring that alternate methodology and revised AMOs before the VSBE at its September 27<sup>th</sup> meeting for approval.

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Finally, we understand that the VDOE will submit the alternate methodology and revised AMOs to the Department for its review and approval. Additionally, the Department expects Virginia to continue to monitor and report on individual subgroup performance and provide increased supports to address areas of low performance. The Department highly recommends that the VDOE provide periodic updates throughout 2012-2013 to stakeholders so that they understand the methodology and the support structures provided to students as well as the progress of the subgroups.

ESEA flexibility is intended to provide educators and State and local leaders with flexibility regarding specific requirements of No Child Left Behind in exchange for rigorous and comprehensive State-developed plans designed to improve educational outcomes for all students, close achievement gaps, increase equity, and improve the quality of instruction. Ambitious but achievable AMOs that require significant closing of achievement gaps between subgroups of students are a critical element of those plans, and the steps the VDOE will take to revise its AMOs clearly reflect its commitment to put into place a system intended to improve the performance of all students and close achievement gaps.

Again, please be assured that we will continue to collaborate with you and your staff. We appreciate being able to work together toward achieving the common goal of preparing all students for success in college and a career, and we look forward to continuing this collaborative relationship with you and all States moving forward. Thank you for your continued commitment to improving educational outcomes for all children in Virginia.

Sincerely,



Deborah S. Delisle