



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

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March 31, 2014

The Honorable Arne Duncan
United States Secretary of Education
United States Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue SW
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary Duncan:

I am writing to request a one-year extension of Virginia's ESEA flexibility, so that Virginia can continue to implement ESEA flexibility provisions through the end of the 2014–2015 school year. The full implementation of Virginia's college- and career-ready standards and corresponding high-quality assessments were already underway when ESEA flexibility was offered to states in the fall of 2011. As well, the Virginia Board of Education had already promulgated *Guidelines for Uniform Performance Standards and Evaluation Criteria for Teachers and Principals*, which were fully implemented for teachers beginning in July 2012 and for principals beginning in July 2013. The granting of waivers from certain requirements of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965* (ESEA), as amended by the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB), has allowed Virginia to design and implement important improvements to its statewide system of accountability and support. The improvements created as a result of ESEA flexibility, and summarized below, complement the state-developed standards, assessments, and educator evaluation reform already in place in Virginia prior to ESEA flexibility:

- Revision of the methodology to establish annual measurable objectives (AMOs) to:
 - reflect new performance trends resulting from revised mathematics and reading assessments;
 - calibrate expectations to align with individual subgroup achievement patterns;
 - reduce the achievement gap between lower- and higher-performing subgroups in half over six years; and
 - establish graduation expectations for *all* subgroups;
- Appropriate identification of schools requiring intensive interventions (priority schools) and targeted interventions (focus schools);
- Concentration of fiscal and human resources on raising the achievement of lowest-performing schools; and

The Honorable Arne Duncan
March 31, 2014
Page Two

- Use of educator evaluation data to support excellent instruction and leadership in all schools, especially the lowest-performing schools.

Extension of Virginia's ESEA flexibility through the end of the 2014–2015 school year is also in the public interest because it continues the state's overall focus on ensuring all students graduate from high school college- and career-ready and possessing the 21st century skills for post-secondary success; it allows the state to intensify and concentrate efforts to provide interventions and resources to the lowest-performing schools; and it provides continued opportunity to close the achievement gaps between student subgroups.

As part of the extension process, Virginia proposes changes to its currently approved ESEA flexibility application. Attached please find the following documents:

- a completed amendment request template, reflecting the necessary consultation of stakeholders and describing substantive amendments Virginia is making to its approved request, including those required of Virginia in its ESEA flexibility Part B monitoring;
- a red-lined version of Virginia's currently approved ESEA flexibility application reflecting updates to the state's implementation and all proposed amendments; and
- a response to two other findings noted in Virginia's ESEA flexibility Part B monitoring report.

I understand that these documents will be reviewed to ensure that they comply with the principles and timelines of ESEA flexibility. Thank you for your consideration of Virginia's ESEA flexibility extension request. We look forward to a timely response.

Sincerely,



Patricia I. Wright, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Public Instruction

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Attachments

1. Completed amendment request template
2. Red-lined version of Virginia's ESEA flexibility request
3. Additional responses to ESEA flexibility Part B monitoring findings

c: H. Douglas Cox, Acting Assistant Superintendent of Instruction
Veronica Tate, Director, Office of Program Administration and Accountability