UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY

AUG 1 4 2009

AUG 2009
Superintendent of Public Instruction

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

Dear Superintendent Wright:

I am pleased to approve Virginia's science standards and assessments under Title I, Part A of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965* (ESEA), as amended. Combined with Virginia's previously approved standards and assessments in reading/language arts and mathematics, Virginia has a fully approved standards and assessment system under Title I of the ESEA. I congratulate you on this significant accomplishment.

My decision regarding Virginia's newly approved science standards and assessments is based on input from peer reviewers external to the U.S. Department of Education (Department) and Department staff who reviewed and carefully considered the evidence submitted by Virginia in March 2009. I have concluded that the evidence provided demonstrates that Virginia's science standards and assessments satisfy the statutory and regulatory requirements under section 1111(b)(1), (3) of the ESEA. As a result, Virginia's standards and assessment system now includes academic content standards in reading/language arts, mathematics, and science; student academic achievement standards in reading/language arts, mathematics, and science; alternate academic achievement standards for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities in reading/language arts, mathematics, and science; general assessments in reading/language arts and mathematics in grades 3 through 8 and one grade in high school and general science assessments for each of three grade spans (grades 3-5, 6-9, and 10-12); and alternate assessments based on alternate academic achievement standards in the corresponding grades in reading/language arts, mathematics, and science. Accordingly, Virginia's standards and assessment system warrants *Full Approval with Recommendations*. This status means that Virginia's standards and assessment system meets all statutory and regulatory requirements; however, some elements of the system could be improved. In particular, the Department recommends that Virginia continue to examine the impact of small sample sizes on the reliability and validity of the Virginia Grade Level Alternative (VGLA), particularly when administered to Limited English Proficient (LEP) students, and the Virginia Alternate Assessment Program (VAAP) through additional collections of evidence and recomputed reliability coefficients, if warranted. The Department also recommends that Virginia develop and implement a plan to address the findings of its alignment study for the Standards of Learning (SOL) reading and mathematics assessments in grades 3-8 and high school and the VGLA. I have enclosed detailed comments from the peer review team that evaluated Virginia's most recent submission for your information.

Please be aware that approval of Virginia's standards and assessment system under the ESEA is not a determination that the system complies with Federal civil rights requirements, including 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*, and requirements under the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*. Finally, please remember that, if Virginia makes significant changes to its standards and assessment system, Virginia must submit information about those changes to the Department for review and approval.

We have found it a pleasure working with your staff on this review. Please accept my congratulations for Virginia's approved standards and assessment system in reading/language arts, mathematics, and science. I wish you well in your continued efforts to improve student achievement in Virginia. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact David J. Harmon of my staff at david.harmon@ed.gov.

Sincerely,

Joseph C. Conaty
Delegated Authority to Perform the Functions and Duties of the Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education

Enclosure

cc: Governor Tim Kaine
Shelly Loving-Ryder