



For Immediate Release: July 3, 2014

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Flexibility Extended for Virginia Public Schools

The US Department of Education today approved Virginia's request for a one-year extension of the commonwealth's Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) flexibility waiver. The waiver — originally approved in 2012 — grants Virginia schools relief from No Child Left Behind-era sanctions and requirements.

"Today's decision to extend the flexibility waiver allows Virginia and its school divisions to plan for the 2014-2015 school year with clear goals for narrowing achievement gaps and improving teaching and learning in under-performing schools," Superintendent of Public Instruction Steven R. Staples said.

Under the flexibility waiver, state interventions are focused on Virginia's lowest-performing Title I schools. The lowest-performing five percent are designated as Priority schools and another 10 percent of Title I schools are identified as Focus schools. Priority schools must hire a state-approved turnaround partner and Focus schools must work with a state-approved school improvement coach.

The waiver also requires the Virginia Board of Education to set annual objectives for narrowing achievement gaps in reading, mathematics and high school graduation rates. While the objectives apply to all schools, they are intended as progress benchmarks for schools that are performing well below standards.

In a letter to Staples, Assistant US Secretary of Education Deborah S. Delisle said Virginia could qualify for a longer extension next spring, provided the commonwealth maintains college- and career-ready standards and assessments, continues to hold schools accountable for narrowing achievement gaps, and continues to monitor local teacher and principal evaluation and support systems for alignment with federal goals.

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