



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

**AUG - 6 2015**

The Honorable Carey M. Wright  
State Superintendent of Education  
Mississippi Department of Education  
PO Box 771  
Jackson, MS 39205

Dear Superintendent Wright:

I am writing in response to Mississippi's request for renewal of flexibility under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended (ESEA flexibility), so that Mississippi may continue to implement ESEA flexibility.

Our team, including my staff and other senior leaders at the U.S. Department of Education (ED), reviewed Mississippi's request dated July 23, 2015. Pursuant to section 9401(d)(2) of the ESEA, I am pleased to renew approval of Mississippi's ESEA flexibility request for three years, through the end of the 2017–2018 school year.

My decision to renew approval of Mississippi's ESEA flexibility request is based on my determination that ESEA flexibility has been effective in enabling Mississippi to carry out important reforms to improve student achievement and that this renewal is in the public interest. With this renewal, Mississippi will be able to continue implementing its plans to promote innovative, locally tailored strategies to improve educational outcomes for all students, close achievement gaps, increase equity, and improve the quality of instruction.

This letter also provides my approval of Mississippi's proposed amendments to its ESEA flexibility request. A summary of the one significant approved amendment is enclosed with this letter.

I have also determined that Mississippi's guidelines for teacher and principal evaluation and support systems meet the requirements for Principle 3 articulated in ED's June 7, 2012 document titled *ESEA Flexibility*. Mississippi's approved request will be posted on ED's website.

This renewal is subject to Mississippi's commitment to:

- Provide additional information to ED, by December 31, 2015, on its progress in carrying out its plans to administer, in school year 2015–2016 and each year thereafter high-quality statewide assessments, in grades 3-8 and once in high school, that are aligned to Mississippi's academic content standards, and alternate assessments for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities based on alternate academic achievement standards aligned to Mississippi's academic content standards.

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<http://www.ed.gov/>

- Demonstrate, during ED’s monitoring and follow-up of ESEA flexibility implementation, that Mississippi is implementing the plan set forth in its ESEA flexibility request, including timeline and milestones, which will lead to inclusion of student growth in the teacher and principal evaluation and support systems based on student performance data from the 2015–2016 school year and each year thereafter.

Mississippi continues to have an affirmative responsibility to ensure that it and its local educational agencies (LEAs) are in compliance with Federal civil rights laws that prohibit discrimination based on race, color, national origin, sex, disability, and age in their implementation of ESEA flexibility. These laws include 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, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, and requirements under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

I am confident that Mississippi will continue to implement the reforms described in its approved ESEA flexibility request and advance its efforts to hold schools and LEAs accountable for the achievement of all students. If you need any additional assistance to implement your ESEA flexibility request, please do not hesitate to contact Stephanie Washington or Celeste McLaughlin of my staff at: [OSS.Mississippi@ed.gov](mailto:OSS.Mississippi@ed.gov).

Thank you for your commitment and continued focus on enhancing education for all of Mississippi’s students.

Sincerely,

(b)(6)

Ann Whalen  
Delegated the authority to perform the functions  
and duties of Assistant Secretary for Elementary  
and Secondary Education

Enclosure

cc: Kim Benton, Chief Academic Officer  
Marcus Cheeks, Director, Office of Federal Programs  
Staci Curry, Director, Office of Accreditation and Accountability

## **Approved Amendment to Mississippi's ESEA Flexibility Request**

The following is a summary of the significant approved amendment to Mississippi's ESEA flexibility request. ED approves this amendment because Mississippi's ESEA flexibility request, as amended, continues to be aligned with the principles of ESEA flexibility. Please refer to ED's website (<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/esea-flexibility/map/ms.html>) for Mississippi's complete ESEA flexibility request.

- **State-Developed Differentiated Recognition, Accountability, and Support (Principle 2)**

Revision: Mississippi will not assign schools new ratings under the State system of differentiated recognition, accountability, and support based on assessments administered in the 2014–2015 school year. Mississippi will resume assigning ratings based on assessments administered in the 2015–2016 school year.