



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY

JUN 25 2009

Honorable Gerald L. Zahorchak
Secretary of Education
Pennsylvania Department of Education
333 Market Street, 10th Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333

Dear Dr. Zahorchak:

Thank you for submitting additional assessment materials for peer review under the standards and assessment requirements of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965* (ESEA), as amended. We appreciate the efforts that were required to prepare for the latest peer review that occurred in March 2009.

In a letter to you on August 28, 2007, we approved your standards and assessment system. However, since that time, you implemented the PSSA and PASA science assessments in grades 4, 8 and 11. Pennsylvania was obligated to submit evidence regarding its science standards and assessments for peer review in 2008–09. Outside peer reviewers and Department staff have evaluated Pennsylvania's science submission. On the basis of that review, I have determined that Pennsylvania's general assessments and alternate assessments based on alternate academic achievement standards in science for grades 4, 8, and 11 do not meet all the statutory and regulatory requirements of section 1111(b)(1) and (3) of the ESEA. Specifically, I cannot approve these assessments due to the need for additional information regarding technical quality, alignment and inclusion. The enclosed list provides greater detail about the evidence Pennsylvania must submit to the Department to demonstrate full compliance of these assessments.

Because Pennsylvania was not able to demonstrate that its general standards and assessments and alternate assessments based on alternate academic achievement standards are fully compliant, Pennsylvania's standards and assessment system is now designated *Approval Pending* and a condition will be placed on Pennsylvania's Title I, Part A grant award. In addition, Pennsylvania is now under Mandatory Oversight, as authorized under 34 C.F.R. § 80.12. Accordingly, Pennsylvania must submit a timeline demonstrating how it will complete the work necessary to implement a fully compliant standards and assessment system in the 2009–10 school year and must submit quarterly reports regarding its progress along that timeline. Pennsylvania may request reconsideration of its Mandatory Oversight status by submitting in writing to me, within 10 days of receipt of this letter, the reasons Pennsylvania believes this status is not justified.

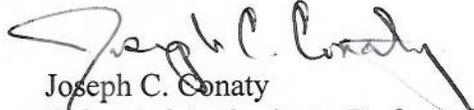
I appreciate the steps Pennsylvania has taken toward meeting the requirements of the ESEA, and I know you are eager to receive full approval of your standards and assessment system. We are

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The Department of Education's mission is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access.

committed to helping you accomplish that goal and remain available to provide technical assistance. We will schedule a peer review in the fall of 2009, or earlier if you have evidence available, to further evaluate your system. If you have any questions or would like to discuss this further, please do not hesitate to contact Sue Rigney (sue.rigney@ed.gov) of my staff.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joseph C. Conaty". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

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

Enclosure

cc: Governor Edward G. Rendell
Shula Nedley

SUMMARY OF ADDITIONAL EVIDENCE THAT PENNSYLVANIA MUST SUBMIT TO MEET ESEA REQUIREMENTS FOR PENNSYLVANIA'S STANDARDS AND ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

2.0 ACHIEVEMENT STANDARDS

1. An explanation of how the state has ensured alignment between its academic content standards and the PASA alternate achievement standards (2.5)

4.0 TECHNICAL QUALITY

Documentation of validity for the PSSA, including:

1. Evidence that scores are related to outside variables as intended (4.1(e))
2. A research design and timeline for evaluation of the intended and unintended consequences of the PSSA (4.1g)

Documentation of validity and reliability for the PASA:

3. Completed General Supervision Enhancement Grant (GSEG) validity study (4.1a)
4. Confirmation that the assignment of students to Levels A, B, and C is appropriate and does not compromise the validity of results (4.1a-b)
5. Evidence that the scores are related to outside variables as intended (4.1e)
6. Evidence that decisions based on PASA results are consistent with the stated purposes of the assessment (4.1f)
7. An explanation of the relation between PASA raw scores and scale scores (4.2b)
8. Conditional standard errors (4.2b)
9. Methods employed to ensure consistency of PASA test forms over time (4.4)

For the PSSA and PASA:

10. Description of how the state monitors the delivery of accommodations as well as the match with IEP/504 plans (4.5)
11. Evaluation of the impact of accommodations on the validity of test results (4.6)

5.0 ALIGNMENT

For the PSSA:

1. Results of the final Achieve alignment study for the PSSA, including the final decisions regarding item "source of challenge" and information regarding actions taken to address issues related to content and process (5.1-5.5)
2. A plan and timeline to address the alignment gaps identified for the PSSA (5.7)

For the PASA:

3. Information regarding construction of the PASA tasks, including task content, format and progression across levels A, B, and C (5.1-5.4)
4. Results of an independent alignment study (5.1-5.4)
5. Plan and timeline to ensure that PASA scores reflect the full range of achievement of the alternate academic achievement standards (no advanced achievement level for PASA levels A and B) (5.5)
6. Revised student reports that include information for parents regarding the knowledge and skills associated with each achievement level (5.6)

7. Systematic procedures for maintaining or improving alignment between the PASA assessment and grade-level content standards over time (5.7)

6.0 INCLUSION

1. Documentation (by total and subgroups) that confirms that all students enrolled in the grades tested are included in either the PSSA or PASA (6.1.1)
2. A state report that includes: the number and percent of students with disabilities assessed on the regular assessment without accommodations, the regular assessment with accommodations, the alternate assessment based on alternate achievement standards, and if applicable, an alternate assessment based on modified achievement standards or alternate assessment based on grade-level achievement standards (6.1.2)

7.0 REPORTS

1. Documentation showing how the state has ensured that individual student reports will be delivered to parents, teachers, and principals as soon as possible after the assessment is administered (7.3 c)