

August 1, 2007

Honorable June St. Clair Atkinson
Superintendent of Public Instruction
State Department of Public Instruction
Education Building
301 North Wilmington Street
Raleigh, North Carolina 27601-2825

Dear Superintendent Atkinson:

I am writing in response to your agency's request, on behalf of seven North Carolina school districts, for a flexibility agreement allowing those districts to provide supplemental educational services (SES) under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), to students attending Title I schools in the first year of school improvement. As you know, North Carolina received approval for a flexibility agreement to participate in this pilot during the 2006-07 school year, and I am granting, under section 9401 of the ESEA, your request for continued participation in the 2007-08 school year.

You have requested that seven school districts within North Carolina be allowed to offer SES to eligible students in Title I schools in the first year of school improvement under NCLB: Burke County, Cumberland County, Durham County, Guilford County, Moore County, Northampton County, and Pitt County. These seven districts would then offer SES and public school choice to eligible students enrolled in any school that moves to the second year of school improvement.

The Department has determined that North Carolina meets the three principles for participation in the pilot: (1) timely notification of adequate yearly progress; (2) a state SES evaluation in progress; and (3) a state assessment system for which the Department has granted Full Approval with Recommendations. Additionally, all seven districts have implemented timely public school choice and SES parental notifications, and two of the districts are rural in nature.

This flexibility agreement permits the seven districts to provide SES to eligible students in Title I schools in the first year of school improvement, thereby reversing the order outlined in sections 1116(b)(1)(E) and 1116(b)(5)(B) of the ESEA. Approval is conditioned on North Carolina's fulfilling the conditions detailed in the enclosure to this letter and summarized below.

North Carolina must ensure in the participating districts: participation by more students in SES and public school choice, parent access to SES providers, timely parental notification, and multiple or continuous enrollment periods in the participating districts. Additionally, North Carolina must supply data to the Department via the Educational Data Exchange Network (EDEN) and must submit an interim report to the Department on the implementation of this pilot project by January 1, 2008, and a final report by June 30, 2008.

As an additional condition for North Carolina, the state must agree to implement several technical assistance activities to assist its pilot districts to increase their SES participation rates. These include:

- State training for principals on SES implementation, including an opportunity for principals to meet providers and learn from other principals who have successfully implemented SES.
- Working with the U.S. Department of Education's Center for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. (North Carolina will focus on using faith-based and community-based organizations to improve SES programs and participation rates.)
- Technical assistance for LEAs. (North Carolina will work with LEAs with the lowest participation rates to help them create a plan to increase participation.)
- Video for parents on providers. (North Carolina will develop a video or other communications tool on their providers for schools to use to reach and inform parents about their SES options.)

In addition, as required by section 9401(b)(3)(B) of the ESEA, within 30 days of the date of this letter, each participating district must provide notice and information to the public about its participation in the pilot in the manner in which it customarily provides similar notice to the public. Each district must also submit a report under section 9401(e)(1) of the ESEA to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction at the end of the 2007-08 school year that: describes the district's provision of SES in Title I schools in the first year of school improvement; describes how those schools continued to provide Title I services to eligible students during that year; and evaluates the progress of the district and schools in increasing the quality of instruction and improving the academic achievement of students. Your agency should then submit this information to the Department as part of the June 30, 2008, final report.

This flexibility agreement applies to the provision of SES in Title I schools in the seven pilot districts during the 2007-08 school year.

SES is an important component of NCLB, and we look forward to working with you to ensure that students in your districts are obtaining quality services and succeeding in the classroom.

Sincerely,

Margaret Spellings

Enclosure

cc: Lynn Warren, Title I Director