



PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF NORTH CAROLINA

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION | June St. Clair Atkinson, Ed.D., *State Superintendent*

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May 12, 2014

Honorable Arne Duncan
Secretary
United States Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 2020

Dear Secretary Duncan:

I am writing to request a one-year extension of North Carolina's ESEA flexibility, so that North Carolina can continue to implement ESEA flexibility through the end of the 2014-15 school year.

North Carolina seeks to extend ESEA flexibility through the end of the 2014-15 school year in order to allow the state to continue to use its limited federal resources to support the principles of the ESEA flexibility by comprehensively planning and delivering assistance for teachers and leadership teams across the state due to the new standards for teaching and learning. As a result of ESEA flexibility, local education agencies (LEAs) and charter schools have received intensive state support for implementing creative and meaningful programs and activities that will result in more students graduating from high school, being better prepared for college, and possessing skills necessary for careers in today's economy.

During the 2013-14 school year, North Carolina offered over 325 face-to-face professional development opportunities for more in-depth examination of the North Carolina Educator Evaluation System, the *North Carolina Standard Course of Study*, and data literacy. In addition, a series of live webinars and chats have been available to districts and schools throughout the year on similar topics. For example, the annual Summer Institutes offered in 2013, served 2,962 participants representing leadership teams from all 115 LEAs and 50 charter schools.

In 2013, North Carolina reached an all-time high four-year cohort graduation rate of 82.5%. This is up from the 2012 rate of 80.4%. In addition, the high school dropout rate in North Carolina decreased to a record low of 2.45%. In 2013-14, North Carolina implemented new college- and career-ready content standards, new state assessments based on those content standards, and established college- and career-ready achievement levels. Because of all of the efforts over the last few years, we anticipate increased student achievement when the 2013-14 results are available.

OFFICE OF THE STATE SUPERINTENDENT

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AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY/AFFIRMATIVE ACTION EMPLOYER

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Extension of North Carolina ESEA flexibility through the end of the 2014-15 school year also is in the public interest because extended ESEA flexibility will provide LEAs and charter schools the opportunity to target resources to meet the needs of local communities and schools. Specifically, the LEAs and charter schools are able to customize rigorous interventions for schools with significant achievement gaps between student subgroups. In addition, continued flexibility will provide focus schools and priority schools the full three years as originally described in North Carolina's approved ESEA flexibility request to implement whole-school intervention models. To support these turnaround efforts at these schools and other low-performing schools, North Carolina has increased the number of state agency staff trained to conduct comprehensive needs assessments at the district and school levels from approximately 80 staff members in 2012 to over 200 in the 2013-14 school year.

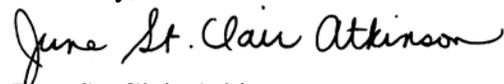
As part of the extension process, North Carolina proposes changes to its currently approved ESEA flexibility request. Attached are the following documents:

- (1) completed amendment submission form reflecting changes to our currently approved ESEA flexibility request; and
- (2) a redlined version of North Carolina's currently approved ESEA flexibility request reflecting all four proposed amendments, and updates to the initial request reflecting additional activities that have occurred during the past two years of ESEA flexibility.

I understand that these documents will be reviewed to ensure that they comply with the principles and timelines of ESEA flexibility.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



June St. Clair Atkinson

JSA:LF:lf

Attachments

- (1) Completed amendment submission form
- (2) Red-lined version of currently approved ESEA flexibility request

ESEA FLEXIBILITY
North Carolina Amendment Submissions

May 12, 2014

Dear Assistant Secretary Delisle:

I am writing on behalf of the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) to request approval to amend the North Carolina's approved ESEA flexibility request. The relevant information, outlined in the *ESEA Flexibility Amendment Submission Process* document, is provided in the table below.

Flexibility Element(s) Affected by the Amendment	Brief Description of Element as Originally Approved	Brief Description of Requested Amendment	Rationale	Process for Consulting with Stakeholders, Summary of Comments, and Changes Made as a Result
Principle 1.C – Develop and Administer Annual, Statewide Aligned, High Quality Assessments that Measure Student Growth	See pages 50 and 51 of the red-lined version of the flexibility request. Originally, NC proposed to administer the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium assessments starting in the 2014-15 school year.	The NC State Board of Education (SBE) voted to delay the administration of the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium assessments until at least the 2016-17 school year. The state will continue to administer the assessments developed and administered for the first time in the 2012-13 school year. These assessments are aligned with the Common Core State	The 2012-13 school year was when new content standards were implemented, new assessments aligned to the new content standards were administered and the assessments provided results that indicate college- and career-readiness standards. The SBE heard from its constituents that in light of all of these changes, it was too soon to switch again to new assessments in the 2014-15 school year and that many schools are not equipped to administer the computer adoptive assessments. During the delay, the SBE will convene a Task Force to study whether the state should eventually move to the Smarter Assessments or to some other assessments in the 2016-17 school year.	The SBE heard from many of its stake holders and made its decision based on that input. This issue was discussed at the SBE meetings in December 2013 and January 2014 and approved at the February 2014 meeting. All meetings of the SBE are open to the public and they also are audio-streamed.

According to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, no persons are required to respond to a collection of information unless such collection displays a valid OMB control number. The valid OMB control number for this information collection is 1810-0581.

Flexibility Element(s) Affected by the Amendment	Brief Description of Element as Originally Approved	Brief Description of Requested Amendment	Rationale	Process for Consulting with Stakeholders, Summary of Comments, and Changes Made as a Result
		Standards (as originally proposed) and provide achievement level results that indicate college- and career-readiness standards (as originally proposed).		
Principle 1.C – Develop and Administer Annual, Statewide Aligned, High Quality Assessments that Measure Student Growth	See page 51 of the red-lined version of the flexibility request. There was no reference to academic achievement levels and descriptors in the original flexibility request.	The NC State Board of Education (SBE) voted to approve new academic achievement levels and descriptors as levels 1-5 instead of the previous levels of 1-4.	With the initial adoption of new rigorous college- and career-readiness achievement levels and descriptors in October 2013, the statewide test scores dropped, on average, about 30 percentage points from the prior standards in terms of students scoring proficient. In February 2014, the SBE discussed the possibility of amending the standards to insert a new achievement level 3 that is one standard error of measurement below the initial achievement level 3 scale score. This new achievement level 3 identifies students who are prepared for the next grade level but do not meet the college- and career-readiness standard. The initial scale score for achievement level 3 is now the scale score for the new achievement level 4 and the initial achievement level 4 scale score is now the scale score for the new achievement level 5. The insertion of the new achievement	The State Superintendent of Public Instruction interacted with four regional groups of LEA superintendents (three were face-to-face meetings and one was a conference call) the last week of January 2014 to discuss this issue. It then became a discussion item for the SBE at its February 2014 meeting. The SBE heard from many of its stake holders and made its decision based on that input. The SBE adopted the new academic achievement levels and descriptors at its March 2014 meeting.

Flexibility Element(s) Affected by the Amendment	Brief Description of Element as Originally Approved	Brief Description of Requested Amendment	Rationale	Process for Consulting with Stakeholders, Summary of Comments, and Changes Made as a Result
			level 3 assists schools in the delivery of differentiated instruction that best meets the needs of the individual student.	
Principle 2.A – Develop and Implement a State-Based System of Differentiated Recognition, Accountability, and Support	See pages 11, 12 and 53 of the red-lined version of the flexibility request. Initially, there was no indexing or labeling of schools.	The NC General Assembly passed legislation entitled School Performance Grades (SPG) that directs the SBE to assign grades of A-F to schools based on the legislated criteria which aligns with the SBE adopted accountability measures. The first assignment of grades will be reported based on the results from the 2013-14 school year.	The NC General Assembly was aware of several other states that have such a model and a majority of the legislators believe it is a good way of letting the public know how well the public schools are performing.	Not applicable.
Principle 2.A – Develop and Implement a State-Based System of Differentiated Recognition, Accountability, and Support	See page 62 of the red-lined version of the flexibility request.	The State Report Card for reporting on the 2013-14 school year results will include the grades of A-F for schools in compliance with the SPG legislation cited above.	This is a requirement of the state legislation.	Not applicable.

Attached to this letter is a redlined version of our approved ESEA flexibility request that would be impacted with strikeouts and additions to demonstrate how the request would change with approval of the proposed amendments. The red-lined version also updates information on other activities that have occurred over the last two years. Please contact Dr. Lou Fabrizio at Lou.Fabrizio@dpi.nc.gov or by phone at 919.807.3770 if you have any questions regarding these proposed amendments.

NCDPI acknowledges that the U.S. Department of Education may request supplementary information to inform consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "June St. Clair Atkinson".

Dr. June St. Clair Atkinson
State Superintendent of Public Instruction