



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

AUG - 6 2015

The Honorable Dianna R. Wentzell  
Commissioner of Education  
Connecticut Department of Education  
165 Capital Avenue  
Room 305, State Office Building  
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Commissioner Wentzell:

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

Our team, including my staff and other senior leaders at the U.S. Department of Education (ED), reviewed Connecticut's request dated August 3, 2015. Pursuant to section 9401(d)(2) of the ESEA, I am pleased to renew approval of Connecticut's ESEA flexibility request for three years, through the end of the 2017–2018 school year.

My decision to renew approval of Connecticut's ESEA flexibility request is based on my determination that ESEA flexibility has been effective in enabling Connecticut to carry out important reforms to improve student achievement and that this renewal is in the public interest. With this renewal, Connecticut 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. Connecticut's approved request will be posted on ED's website.

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

I have also determined that Connecticut'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*.

This renewal is subject to Connecticut's commitment to:

- Provide to ED, by December 31, 2015, additional information on its progress in carrying out its high-quality plan set forth in its ESEA flexibility request, including timeline and milestones, that will lead to implementation of high-quality statewide assessments in high school in reading/language arts and mathematics that are aligned to its college- and career-ready standards in the 2015–2016 school year and each year thereafter.

400 MARYLAND AVE., SW, WASHINGTON, DC 20202  
<http://www.ed.gov/>

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

- Demonstrate, during ED’s monitoring and follow-up of ESEA flexibility implementation, that Connecticut is implementing the plan set forth in its ESEA flexibility request, including timeline and milestones, that will lead to inclusion of student growth in teacher and principal evaluation and support systems based on State assessments administered no later than the 2016–2017 school year and each year thereafter.
- Clarify through an amended request, no later than September 1, 2016, the Statewide approach that will be used for the calculation of student growth, based on State assessments administered in the 2016–2017 school year and each year thereafter, in teacher and principal evaluation and support systems. Connecticut committed to the development and implementation of a Statewide approach for the calculation of student growth based on State assessments in teacher and principal evaluation and support systems in its ESEA flexibility renewal request.

In its renewal request, Connecticut requested an amendment that would exempt performance on the State’s English language arts (ELA) and mathematics assessments for “recently arrived” English Learners (ELs) in grades three through eight who have attended schools in the United States for less than two years from the performance component of the State’s accountability system. Instead, Connecticut would assess all recently arrived ELs in grades three through eight in ELA and mathematics in their first year in schools in the United States and use the results as a baseline to measure longitudinal academic growth in their second year in schools in the United States, and include this growth as part of its accountability system (Indicator 2). Connecticut would include all recently arrived ELs in grades three through eight in ELA and mathematics in both the school achievement status measure (Indicator 1) and the longitudinal academic growth measure (Indicator 2) of its accountability model in the students’ third year in schools in the United States.

After careful consideration of this matter, I am pleased to approve the amendment, subject to the conditions outlined below. Pursuant to my authority in Section 9401 of the ESEA, I am granting Connecticut a waiver of 34 C.F.R. § 200.20(f)(1)(ii) beginning in the 2015–2016 school year through the 2017–2018 school year subject to the following conditions:

1. Connecticut may exempt all recently arrived EL students in grades three through eight from the academic achievement component of its Next Generation Accountability Model in their second year enrolled in schools in the United States so long as Connecticut includes such students in the longitudinal academic growth component of the State’s Next Generation Accountability Model in that year, using the ELA and mathematics assessments administered to the students during their first year of enrollment to provide a baseline for the growth calculation.
2. Connecticut must include in the academic achievement and academic growth components of its Next Generation Accountability Model in ELA and mathematics the performance of all ELs, including recently arrived ELs who have been enrolled in schools in the United States for more than two years.
3. Connecticut must: (1) include the performance of recently arrived ELs on the State’s ELA and mathematics assessments in reporting student achievement under ESEA section 1111(h)(1)(C)(i) and (h)(2)(B), respectively, beginning in their first year in schools in the United States; and (2) include performance on the ELA and mathematics assessments of all recently arrived ELs in the calculation of annual measurable objectives (AMOs) after the students’ second year enrolled in schools in the United States.

The waiver described above does not in any way affect the requirements to administer science assessments to recently arrived ELs on the required timeline.

Connecticut 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 Connecticut 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 Deanna Klingensmith or Christopher Fenton of my staff at: [OSS.Connecticut@ed.gov](mailto:OSS.Connecticut@ed.gov).

Thank you for your commitment and continued focus on enhancing education for all of Connecticut'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: Charlene Tucker-Russell, Chief Operating Officer

## **Approved Amendments to Connecticut's ESEA Flexibility Request**

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

### **College- and Career Ready Expectations for All Students (Principle 1)**

**Revision:** A legislative change in Connecticut (Public Act 15-238) requires the SAT to be administered Statewide to all students enrolled in grade eleven, beginning with the 2015–2016 school year, and to use this for Federal accountability purposes. Connecticut has submitted a high-quality plan for transition to this new assessment, including timeline and milestones, which addresses key areas related to test development, administration, scoring, reporting, and research studies.

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

**Revision:** Connecticut 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. Connecticut will resume assigning ratings based on assessments administered in the 2015–2016 school year.

**Revision:** In 2015–2016, Connecticut will implement its “Next Generation Accountability Model.” Based on the sum of weighted scores in the multiple measurement areas, each school will receive a rating of one (highest) through five (lowest). The “Next Generation Accountability Model” will be used to identify highest-performing schools and high-progress schools, as well as Focus and Priority schools (Turnaround Schools). Ratings will direct differentiated interventions for all schools as well as inform the process for building capacity to improve student learning.