



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

SEP 25 2014

The Honorable Kevin Huffman
Commissioner of Education
State Department of Education
6th Floor, Andrew Johnson Tower
710 James Robertson Parkway
Nashville, TN 37243

Dear Commissioner Huffman:

This letter is in response to Tennessee's May 13, 2014 request for a one-year extension of flexibility under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended (ESEA flexibility), so that Tennessee may continue to implement ESEA flexibility through the end of the 2014–2015 school year.

Our team has reviewed Tennessee's request and, pursuant to section 9401(d)(2) of the ESEA, I am pleased to extend Tennessee's ESEA flexibility request for one year, through the end of the 2014–2015 school year. My decision to extend Tennessee's ESEA flexibility request is based on my determination that ESEA flexibility has been effective in enabling Tennessee to carry out important reforms to improve student achievement and that this extension is in the public interest. I have also determined that Tennessee's monitoring next steps have been adequately addressed through submission of documentation and other information. This letter also provides my approval of those amendments that Tennessee proposed that align with the principles of ESEA flexibility. A summary of Tennessee's approved amendments is enclosed with this letter, and Tennessee's amended request will be posted on the U.S. Department of Education's (ED) website.

Tennessee's progress in implementing its approved ESEA flexibility request during the 2014–2015 school year, including meeting the high-quality assessment requirement, will inform ED's decision regarding renewal of Tennessee's ESEA flexibility after the 2014–2015 school year. Additionally, if Tennessee continues to fully implement teacher and principal evaluation and support systems that meet all the requirements of ESEA flexibility, Tennessee will be eligible for consideration for a longer renewal of ESEA flexibility in the spring of 2015.

Tennessee continues to have an affirmative responsibility to ensure that it and its districts 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.

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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.

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I am confident that Tennessee will continue to implement the reforms described in its approved ESEA flexibility request and advance its efforts to hold schools and school districts 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 Victoria Hammer at: victoria.hammer@ed.gov or Leticia Braga at: leticia.braga@ed.gov. Thank you for your commitment and continued focus on enhancing education for all of Tennessee's students.

Sincerely,



Deborah S. Delisle
Assistant Secretary

Enclosure

cc: Hanseul Kang, Chief of Staff

Approved Amendments to Tennessee's ESEA Flexibility Request

The following is a summary of approved amendments to Tennessee's ESEA flexibility request. The U.S. Department of Education (ED) approves these amendments because Tennessee'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/tn.html>) for Tennessee's complete ESEA flexibility request.

- **Develop and Administer Annual, Statewide, Aligned, High-Quality Assessments That Measure Student Growth (Element 1.C)**

Revision: Tennessee changed the way that it will meet the high-quality assessment requirement under ESEA flexibility by indicating that it has developed and is annually administering Statewide assessments that measure student growth in reading/language arts and in mathematics in at least grades 3-8 and at least once in high school in all local educational agencies (LEAs) rather than administer the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessments in 2014–2015. Please note that approval of these amendments does not constitute approval of the assessments that Tennessee intends to implement in 2014–2015. Tennessee will need to submit the assessments for peer review when the new assessment peer-review process is available.

- **Priority Schools (Element 2.D)**

Revision: Tennessee revised the timeline on which the schools that it identified as priority schools under its approved ESEA flexibility request will fully implement either one of the four school improvement grant models or interventions aligned with the turnaround principles. Specifically, the requisite number of priority schools in Tennessee will implement interventions consistent with ESEA flexibility no later than the 2014–2015 school year.

- **Focus Schools (Element 2.E)**

Revision: Tennessee articulated how it will ensure that its LEAs will monitor and provide technical assistance to all identified Title I Focus Schools. In particular, Tennessee will assign a point of contact from the appropriate Center of Regional Excellence (CORE) to those Title I Focus Schools that do not receive support from either a statewide contract with Public Consulting Group or as part of receiving funds in the State's competitive Focus School grant competition to ensure that these schools address the needs of students that led to their identification as a Focus School.

- **Other Title I Schools (Element 2.F)**

Revision: Tennessee articulated how it will ensure that LEAs with Title I schools not identified as focus or priority schools but in which students consistently miss performance targets, including graduation rate targets, provide incentives and supports to those schools to address the needs of students. In particular, Tennessee will assign a point of contact from the appropriate CORE to LEAs with Title I schools described above to work with LEA leadership in providing necessary incentives and supports to ensure the needs of students are met.