

Pennsylvania Assessment Letter

August 28, 2007

Dr. Gerald L. Zahorchak
Secretary of Education
Pennsylvania Department of Education
333 Market Street
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17126

Dear Secretary Zahorchak:

I am pleased to approve Pennsylvania's assessment system under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). I congratulate you on meeting this important NCLB requirement.

My decision is based on input from peer reviewers external to the U.S. Department of Education (the Department) and Department staff who reviewed and carefully considered the evidence submitted by Pennsylvania. I have concluded that the evidence demonstrates that Pennsylvania's standards and assessment system satisfies the NCLB requirements. Specifically, Pennsylvania's system includes academic content standards in reading/language arts, mathematics, and science; student achievement standards in reading/language arts and mathematics; alternate achievement standards for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities in reading and mathematics; grade-level assessments in each of grades 3-8 and 11 in reading/language arts and mathematics; and the Pennsylvania Alternate System of Assessment (PASA) in reading/language arts and mathematics in grades 3-8 and 11.

Accordingly, Pennsylvania's system warrants Full Approval with Recommendations. This status means that Pennsylvania's standards and assessment system meets all statutory and regulatory requirements for reading/language arts and mathematics, but the assessment system could be strengthened in some ways. We recommend that Pennsylvania conduct research on the effects on validity of student assignment to the PASA levels of task difficulty or complexity (levels A, B, and C).

Please be aware that approval of Pennsylvania's assessment system under NCLB is not a determination that the system complies with Federal civil rights requirements, including 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, and requirements under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Finally, please remember that, if Pennsylvania makes significant changes in its assessment system, the State must submit information about those changes to the Department for review and approval.

We have found it a pleasure working with your staff on this review. Please accept my congratulations for your State's approved standards and assessment system under NCLB. I wish you well in your continued efforts to improve student achievement in Pennsylvania.

Sincerely,

Kerri L. Briggs, Ph.D.

cc: Governor Edward Rendell
Shula Nedley

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