

OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION
[ENCOURAGEMENT FOR STATES TO PHASE OUT HOUSSE]



September 5, 2006

Dear Chief State School Officers:

To meet the goal that all students will be on grade level in reading and mathematics by 2014, we need to pick up the pace in our efforts to ensure that all core academic subjects are taught by highly qualified and effective teachers. To that end, on March 21, 2006, Assistant Secretary Henry Johnson invited each State educational agency (SEA) to submit a revised plan for ensuring that, by the end of the 2006-07 school year, all classes in the core academic subjects will be taught by a highly qualified teacher.

In addition, on May 12, Dr. Johnson asked each State to describe in its plan how it would complete the High Objective Uniform State Standard of Evaluation (HOUSSE) procedures for those teachers hired prior to the end of the 2005-06 school year, and how the SEA would limit the use of HOUSSE procedures for teachers hired after the end of the 2005-06 school year to three situations: secondary school teachers teaching multiple subjects in eligible rural districts who were highly qualified in one subject at the time of hire; special education teachers teaching multiple subjects who were highly qualified in language arts, mathematics, or science at the time of hire; and teachers from other countries teaching here on a temporary basis.

The Department took these actions based on two factors. First, for the most part, we believe that teachers who are not new to the profession no longer need HOUSSE procedures to demonstrate their subject-matter competency. The vast majority of these teachers have completed, or soon will complete, their State's HOUSSE process. Second, the Department's recent monitoring of every State found that many of the HOUSSE procedures were substantially less rigorous than the other measures authorized in the statute for determining subject-matter competency.

As requested, all States submitted a revised plan by July 7. We were very encouraged to see that nine States (Kansas, Louisiana, Maryland, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, Ohio, South Carolina, and South Dakota) prepared plans that, according to the peer review, comprehensively addressed all of the required components the Department had identified. In addition, many States proposed actions consistent with the request to limit the use of HOUSSE procedures. Given that most States are committed to limiting or eliminating the use of HOUSSE procedures, the Department intends to pursue the further phaseout of HOUSSE procedures through the reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). In the interim the Department will focus on the very important requirement in the Title I statute of ensuring that "poor and minority" children have the same access to highly qualified teachers as all other children.

Nevertheless, as a matter of policy and good education practice, we continue to strongly encourage States to eliminate the use of HOUSSE procedures to the extent practicable. As noted above, too many States have HOUSSE procedures that provide relatively weak indicators of a teacher's attainment of subject-matter knowledge. In particular, the Department is concerned about the practice of allowing teachers who have been assigned to teach new subjects, for which they have had little preparation, to use non-rigorous HOUSSE procedures to quickly demonstrate subject-matter competency. I urge you to reexamine your HOUSSE procedures to ensure that this is not the case in your State. Our students and parents deserve no less.

If you have further questions about these matters, please do not hesitate to contact Assistant Secretary Henry Johnson on (202) 401-0113 or at Henry.Johnson@ed.gov.

I hope that you will be able to participate in the Webcast that the Department, in partnership with the National Comprehensive Center on Teacher Quality, will be holding on September 7, 2006, to assist States in further strengthening

Eliminating HOUSSE

their plans for having all core academic subjects taught by highly qualified teachers. We look forward to our continued work together to improve the quality of the nation's teaching force, and to ensure that all children can achieve to their fullest potential.

Margaret Spellings, Secretary
U.S. Department of Education