



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY

FEB 28 2008

Dear Chief State School Officer,

Over the last year, I've met with you individually, in small groups, and with the Council of Chief State School Officers to discuss the Department's peer review process for Title I standards and assessments. At the risk of over-simplifying, I have heard that the process is valuable, but that you would like greater transparency and more interaction between the states, Department, and external peer reviewers. We agree and all feel a sense of urgency to improve the process. Thank you for your patience and the time it allowed for the Department to be deliberative about those adjustments.

Before mentioning the new elements, allow me to summarize the changes that were implemented in the fall. States may now select a reviewer from the list of approved reviewers to participate in the peer review of the state's evidence. At the conclusion of the review, peer reviewers and Department staff call each state to seek clarification of evidence, as necessary, or discuss questions to ensure that the peer team and Department staff fully understand the submitted evidence.

Today, I am writing to announce a change to the peer review process for science assessments. Responding to concerns that the process is not transparent and does not provide sufficient, timely feedback to states, I am providing the opportunity, beginning with the science reviews this May, for states to have a face-to-face conversation with the peers and to receive technical assistance from these experts in assessment.

The science peer review process will consist of three elements: 1) a submission of core information to demonstrate compliance with the basic requirements for administering science assessments for 2007-08, 2) an optional Technical Assistance Peer Review session to provide feedback on areas such as technical quality and alignment, and 3) Peer Review to demonstrate full compliance with the ESEA requirements for science assessments. This year provides a unique opportunity to implement these changes. This is the first year science assessments are required to be administered once each in grades 3-5, 6-9, and 10-12 and science assessments are not included in determinations of adequate yearly progress. If this approach proves beneficial to states and results in better assessment systems for students, I will consider offering a technical assistance component for all future peer reviews.

Submission of Core Information for Science Standards and Assessments for 2007-08

For 2007-08, each state must, at a minimum, submit information demonstrating that it meets the following four criteria (with examples of evidence as noted below):

1. The state must have content standards in science. (Submission of additional evidence is not necessary because every state has met this criterion. However, if a state has changed its science content standards since their approval, it must submit for approval evidence of the development and adoption of the new standards.)
2. The state must administer a general and alternate science assessment in each grade span 3-5, 6-9, and 10-12. (The state must submit evidence of test administration manuals and test dates.)
3. The state must include all students in its general or alternate science assessments. (The state must submit evidence of policy statements communicated to the field as well as data showing the inclusion of all enrolled students on the day of testing.)

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4. The state must report the results of general and alternate science assessments on state, district, and school report cards. (The state must submit evidence of sample reports or report shells.)

States that are unable to meet the four criteria listed above have not met the basic requirements of the statute and will be subject to consequences, such as withholding of Title I, Part A administrative funds. All states must submit evidence of the four criteria above by **April 21** to your state's contact for standards, assessment, and accountability within the Student Achievement and School Accountability (SASA) office. For your convenience, I have enclosed the most up-to-date list of those contacts.

Optional Technical Assistance Peer Review

As mentioned above, an optional Technical Assistance Peer Review of science standards and assessments will be held during the week of May 11. This review will consider the same elements as those reviewed for reading/language arts and mathematics, consistent with the Department's *Peer Review Guidance*. After the peer team has analyzed the state submission, I invite state representatives to meet in person with peers and Department staff to receive technical assistance. If your staff is unable to meet in person, we will schedule a telephone call, as we have been doing for reading/language arts and mathematics reviews. During this conversation, peers and Department staff will ask clarifying questions about the evidence, the state representatives can ask clarifying questions about the peers' recommendations, and both staff and peers can provide recommendations on the evidence the state may still need to submit in order to demonstrate compliance with the ESEA requirements. Hopefully, this review will provide states that are not yet able to demonstrate full compliance with technical assistance to enable them to do so by the 2008–09 peer review discussed below. This face-to-face conversation is not intended, however, to provide a final judgment of the assessment system – that role properly resides within the Department and requires further staff deliberation once we receive the peers' recommendations.

While this review is optional, I strongly encourage states that have been administering science assessments prior to 2007–08 and that have a complete set of evidence to participate in the Technical Assistance Peer Review. If the Technical Assistance Peer Review and further staff deliberations indicate that a state's science achievement standards and assessments meet all ESEA requirements, the state's system will be fully approved. If the Technical Assistance Peer Review and further staff deliberations indicate further work is necessary, a state will receive the peer notes regarding areas where further evidence is necessary and have until the 2008–09 peer review to demonstrate full compliance.

States wishing to participate in the Technical Assistance Peer Review must submit their evidence by April 21. Please contact the SASA team member for your state no later than **March 14** to indicate whether you will be submitting evidence for the May review so that we may plan accordingly. In keeping with the changes made last fall, states may select one of the peers from the list of approved peers for your state's review. When indicating whether you will submit evidence for the May review, please identify whether there is a peer you would like to appoint so that we may factor that into our planning.

Demonstration of Full Compliance

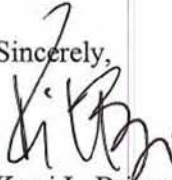
In 2008–09, any state without fully approved science standards and assessments must submit complete evidence for peer review during one of several, yet-to-be determined peer review dates in winter 2008 and spring 2009. These peer reviews will follow the process used for reading/language arts and mathematics. Several states already have approved science standards and assessments as part of their approved standards and assessment systems. These states are: Delaware, Indiana, New York, Ohio, Tennessee, Utah, and West Virginia. None of these states need to submit evidence for peer review unless it has made substantial changes to its science assessments since they were approved.

Changes to State Assessment Systems in Reading/Language Arts, Mathematics, or Science

Assessment design is, by its very nature, an on-going, cyclical process. Every few years, a state re-evaluates its content standards, validates its academic achievement standards, and modifies its assessment system accordingly. States also develop new standards and assessments. Several states, for example, have created and are administering an alternate assessment based on modified academic achievement standards in response to the Department's April 2007 Title I regulations. As a follow-up to my September 5 letter, enclosed is additional guidance for states that are making changes to their approved assessment system. This guidance is intended to clarify what constitutes a significant change and the evidence that a state must submit for peer review.

Once again, I appreciate the hard work being done by every state to continue to develop and improve your assessment system. This work is the backbone of NCLB and helps provide useful information about the progress we are making in ensuring every child is given the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in college and the workforce. I have scheduled a conference call for Tuesday, March 4 at 4:00 p.m. Eastern time to discuss these issues and answer any questions you might have. We will forward the telephone number and pass-code for that conversation within the next day. I encourage your staff, particularly your state assessment director, to join us for this conversation. As always, we remain available to provide technical assistance, whenever necessary.

Sincerely,



Kerri L. Briggs, Ph.D.

Enclosures

cc: Gene Wilhoit
Governors

Attachment A

Changes to an Approved Assessment System

The letter approving a state's assessment system under NCLB includes the sentence, "...if the state makes significant changes in its standards and assessment system, the state must submit information about those changes to the Department for review and approval." Significant changes are described below and in the enclosed table, providing a summary and indicating the evidence, as listed in the Department's *Peer Review Guidance*, that must be submitted for review. For all significant changes noted below, the state must notify the Department as these changes are being planned and developed, prior to making the change, so that a timeline can be determined for the state to submit documentation for review consistent with the *Peer Review Guidance*.

New Content Standards

States periodically develop and adopt new content standards or grade-level expectations. Such changes often require the development of new assessments aligned with these content standards and grade-level expectations. As you know, the Department's review and approval of the assessment system includes a review of the process used to develop the content standards. Documentation consistent with section 1 of the *Peer Review Guidance*, such as the inclusion of diverse stakeholders and the process to ensure challenging and coherent standards, must be submitted at the time the assessments are reviewed.

New Academic Achievement Standards

States may define and approve new academic achievement standards for several reasons, such as the introduction of a new assessment, state-level policy decisions to change a cut point, or the need for improved vertical articulation or vertical moderation to support accountability determinations based on growth. If the change to the achievement standards is sufficient to disrupt continuity of the established trend data, peer review is required. For the adoption of new academic achievement standards associated with a new assessment, documentation consistent with the *Peer Review Guidance* may be submitted at the time the assessments are reviewed.

New Assessment

States may add an assessment that was not previously required, such as science, add an existing assessment that was not previously peer reviewed because it was not included in AYP determinations, develop a new assessment, such as an alternate assessment based on modified academic achievement standards, or move from a high school graduation test to an end-of-course test. All new assessments included in AYP calculations must be peer reviewed and approved by the Department. The state must document, and submit for peer review, all aspects of the assessment in a manner consistent with the *Peer Review Guidance*. Information regarding the test design and development should be submitted for review prior to the first administration, with final documentation of technical quality, alignment, and inclusion to follow the first administration in a timely manner.

Change to an Established Test Administration

States may alter the test design or format of a test that has previously been determined meets the ESEA requirements. The intent of these alterations may be to address the same content standards and maintain the same rigor and interpretation of scores. For example, a test may be translated or presented in an alternative format such as simplified English or administered by computer. When multiple variations of a test are used, the state must document that results are comparable. That is, all versions of the test measure the same constructs, have similar technical properties, and result in scores that can be used interchangeably. If a state introduces a new variation of an existing assessment, it must document, and submit for peer review, comparability evidence in a manner consistent with the *Peer Review Guidance*.

Change to a Established Test Design

While content standards may remain unchanged, states may alter the assessment to measure a different set of knowledge and skills, to produce scores that reflect a different degree of achievement on the same constructs, or to create different technical properties in relation to the level of score reported. These types of changes would be evident in use of a different test framework or content specifications. If the results cannot be equated to the previous version of the test using commonly accepted equating procedures, the state must document, and submit for peer review, all aspects of the assessment in a manner consistent with the *Peer Review Guidance*.

Examples of Significant Changes to a State’s Approved Assessment System and the Evidence Necessary to Peer Review

Change to Approved Assessment System	Significant Change?	Sections from the <i>Peer Review Guidance</i> for which Evidence Must be Submitted
New content standards adopted	Yes—if it results in revisions in assessments.	Evidence from sections 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7
New academic achievement standards adopted	Yes	Evidence from sections 2, 4 (reliability-classification decision consistency and accuracy, and standards-setting procedures), and 7
Local assessments are now being used for AYP purposes	Yes	Evidence from sections 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7
Changes to an established test	Yes	Evidence from sections 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7
Development and administration of science assessments once each in grades 3-5, 6-9, and 10-12 (general and alternate assessment based on alternate academic achievement standards)	Yes	Evidence from sections 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7
Development and administration of alternate assessments based on modified academic achievement standards	Yes	Evidence from sections 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7
Development and administration of simplified English version or native-language version used for AYP	Yes	Evidence from sections 2, 3, 4 (comparability, validity, reliability, and criteria for administration, scoring, analysis, reporting; fair and accessible to all students; standards-setting procedures), 5, 6, and 7
End-of-course test (state changes from grade-level assessment to end-of-course test)	Yes	Evidence from sections 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7
Development of an on-line version being used simultaneously with paper/pencil administration	Yes	Evidence from section 3 (comparability) and section 4 (technical quality)