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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY
EDUCATION

Dear Title I Directors:

As we start 2015, I would like to take this opportunity to applaud the hard work going on in States, local educational agencies (LEAs), and schools across the nation to implement college- and career-ready content standards. I know the work you are doing will help to provide the academic foundation students need to succeed in college and the workforce. Many of you are preparing to administer new assessments aligned to those college- and career-ready standards to your students for the first time this spring. These new assessments will provide better and more useful information about what students know and can do. I appreciate the hard work you have put in to create thoughtful plans to implement innovative, locally appropriate strategies that address your State's most pressing education challenges and enhance the support to educators and students.

As the majority of States begin implementing new assessments this spring, I want to provide guidance on a few important transition issues related to your assessment and accountability systems. The new assessments will likely impact your State's annual measurable objectives (AMOs) and other accountability measures, such as calculations for safe harbor and student growth. I know many of you have already started planning for how the State accountability system will account for these changes.

As part of our guidance to States regarding the ESEA flexibility renewal process, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) recently announced that, due to the significant change in assessment systems in so many States implementing ESEA flexibility and the importance of moving to assessments aligned to college- and career-ready standards, ED is permitting any State administering new college- and career-ready-aligned assessments in the 2014-2015 school year to not assign schools new ratings based on those assessments. A State would still be required to publicly report the results of the assessments, including against AMOs, but the State may assign the same school ratings and permit its schools and LEAs to continue the same interventions that are being used in the 2014-2015 school year. The State would resume annually assigning schools a new rating based on the 2015-2016 assessments. A State that would like to take advantage of this opportunity should amend its ESEA flexibility request through the renewal process.

I want to make clear that this opportunity is available to **all** States that are administering new assessments aligned to college- and career-ready standards in the 2014-2015 school year, even States that are not implementing ESEA flexibility. A State without ESEA flexibility that would like to take advantage of this opportunity may submit a request to ED no later than **March 31, 2015**, for a waiver to permit the State to continue in 2015-2016 the improvement status that a school or LEA has for the 2014-2015 school year and permit the school or LEA to continue implementing the same interventions that it is using this year if the reason for missing adequate

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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.

yearly progress (AYP) based on 2014-2015 assessments is due to achievement in reading/language arts or mathematics in the school or LEA. The State would still need to calculate AYP based on assessments administered in the 2014-2015 school year and report this information publicly, in addition to reporting the results of the assessments.

In addition, there are several technical aspects of a State's accountability system that are likely to be impacted by the new assessments being administered in many States. To assist you in this transition, we want to remind you of several opportunities that are available to you.

I. Option to Reset AMOs for States with ESEA Flexibility

A State with an approved ESEA flexibility request may reset its AMOs upon administering new assessments or adopting new achievement standards. To support this work, ED has revised the options for States to set AMOs by extending the end points originally established in section B of *ESEA Flexibility Frequently Asked Questions* (available at: www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/esea-flexibility/flex-renewal/index.html). That is, an eligible State that would like to reset its AMOs may choose one of three options:

- **Option A: Cutting the gap in half.** The State may set AMOs in annual equal increments toward a goal of reducing the percentage of students who are not proficient by half within six years from 2014-2015 for the "all students" group and each subgroup.
- **Option B: 100 percent proficiency.** The State may set AMOs that increase in annual equal increments and result in 100 percent of students achieving proficiency no later than the end of the 2022-2023 school year.
- **Option C: Another method.** Use another method that is educationally sound and results in ambitious but achievable AMOs for all LEAs, schools, and subgroups.

Attachment A provides more details and examples regarding the timelines for resetting AMOs under Options A and B. An eligible State that would like to reset its AMOs based on new assessments administered in the 2014-2015 school year should submit the proposal as soon as possible but not later than January 31, 2016.

2. Timely AYP and accountability determinations

The transition to new assessments may also impact how and when a State identifies schools under its accountability system. Due to the timeline for State adoption (or confirmation) of new achievement standards, I am aware that many States will be unable to provide accountability determinations based on new assessment data before the start of the 2015-2016 school year. If this is true for your State, ED will work with you regarding your timeline for setting and adopting academic achievement standards, providing assessment results to LEAs schools, parents, and the public, and making accountability determinations.

For States with ESEA flexibility

As noted above, a State with ESEA flexibility has the option to request to "pause" its school rating system based on assessments administered in the 2014-2015 school year. For a State that does not choose to exercise this option, we understand that school accountability

determinations may be delayed. Additional information about school identification and renewal requirements can be found in the ESEA flexibility renewal guidance and FAQs at: www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/esea-flexibility/flex-renewal/index.html.

For States without ESEA flexibility

As a result of the implementation of new assessments, we understand that AYP determinations will be delayed until the results become available. As noted above, a State may request to waive accountability determinations based on achievement results for assessments administered in the 2014-2015 school year. Schools and LEAs that do not make AYP based on participation rate, graduation rate, or the other academic indicator in elementary and middle schools would advance to offer the next level of interventions. A State requesting this waiver must, no later than March 31, 2015, provide the plan and timeline for publicly reporting AYP designations and the results of the assessments, including achievement against AMOs, and an assurance that the State will resume annual accountability determinations in the 2016-2017 school year based on the assessments administered in the 2015-2016 school year. Although we understand that notification will likely occur after the start of the school year, I want to underscore the importance of providing information to parents and the public as soon as possible, particularly so that parents have a meaningful opportunity to take advantage of any interventions that flow from accountability determinations.

A State not seeking to waive accountability determinations based on achievement results from the 2014-2015 assessments must submit a plan by **March 31, 2015**, outlining the timeline and steps for making AYP determinations and providing information to LEAs and schools, including:

- At the beginning of the 2015-2016 school year, all schools and LEAs in the State retain the same AYP status as during the 2014-2015 school year.
- All schools and LEAs that cannot exit improvement status must implement the appropriate interventions prior to the start of the school year. If these schools and LEAs do not make AYP based upon the 2014-2015 assessment data, they must begin offering the next level of services.
- Schools and LEAs on the "watch list" (i.e., schools and LEAs that did not make AYP for the first time based upon 2013-2014 (or the most recent available) assessment data should be notified to plan for the possibility of offering services (e.g., public school choice) and must act immediately when the 2014-2015 data become available.
- Schools and LEAs previously identified as in need of improvement that make AYP for the first time based on 2014-2015 assessment data may continue to offer the same level of services as in 2014-2015. A school or LEA that makes AYP for the second consecutive year based on 2014-2015 assessment data, once it is available, will no longer be identified for improvement.

In short, in all cases, all schools and LEAs previously identified for improvement must continue to implement interventions consistent with Section 1116 of the ESEA.

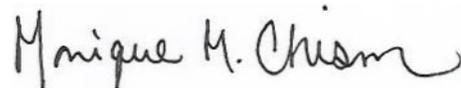
3. Measuring safe harbor and individual student growth

A State may continue to calculate safe harbor and approved measures of individual student growth in its accountability system during this transition, provided it can determine a

statistically valid method for so doing. States without data from the 2013-2014 school year may make safe harbor and growth decisions based on the change in student achievement between the 2012-2013 and 2014-2015 school years. States have previously identified ways to calculate safe harbor during the transition to new assessments. Appendix B provides one example of how to calculate safe harbor for a State to consider. A State with ESEA flexibility should include in its ESEA flexibility renewal request if and how the State proposes to calculate safe harbor or individual student growth, as applicable. A State without ESEA flexibility should identify how the State proposes to calculate safe harbor or individual student growth, as applicable, as part of the plan provided by **March 31, 2015**. A State that does not have a statistically valid method to determine growth between different assessments may not make safe harbor or growth determinations.

Thank you again for your commitment to improving educational outcomes for all students. I look forward to our continued partnership in this critical work. If you have any questions, please contact your OSS program officers.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Monique M. Chism". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "M".

Monique M. Chism, Ph.D. Director
Office of State Support

Enclosures

Attachment A: Annual Measurable Objectives

An eligible SEA that would like to reset its AMOs can choose one of three options:

- Option A: Cutting the gap in half. The State may set AMOs in annual equal increments toward a goal of reducing the percentage of students who are not proficient by half within six years for the "all students" group and each subgroup.
- Option B: 100 percent proficiency. The State may set AMOs that increase in annual equal increments and result in 100 percent of students achieving proficiency no later than the end of the 2022-2023 school year.
- Option C: Another method. Use another method that is educationally sound and results in ambitious but achievable AMOs for all LEAs, schools, and subgroups.

Under any of the three methods, the State may set statewide AMOs or AMOs that differ by LEA, school, or subgroup so long as the LEAs, schools, or subgroups with lower proficiency levels are required to achieve greater rates of annual progress than their peers with higher levels of performance. The AMOs must be ambitious but achievable and provide meaningful goals that are used to guide support and improvement efforts for the State, LEAs, schools, and student subgroups. The State must submit targets to be reported against based on the assessments administered in the 2014-2015 school year (and not just using the data as a baseline for future years). A State that would like to reset its AMOs based on new assessments administered in the 2014-2015 school year should submit the proposal as soon as possible but not later than January 31, 2016.

Resetting AMOs is only permissible following the administration of a new assessment system or when the State has set new achievement standards. Transition or bridge assessments (e.g., modified versions of existing assessments designed for short-term use during a transition to new content standards) are not a sufficient cause for a State to reset its AMOs.

Examples for Setting AMOs

Option A -Cutting the gap in half

Under the State's original ESEA Flex plan.

Subgroup	Baseline	Year 1	Year2	Year3	Year4	Year 5	Year6
	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
All Students	40	45	50	55	60	65	70

Note: States then apply the same method by subgroup.

Resetting AMOs following administration of new assessments in 2014-2015.

Subgroup	Baseline	Year 1	Year2	Year3	Year4	Year 5	Year6
	2014-15	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
All Students	40	45	50	55	60	65	70

Notes: States then applied the same method by subgroup. 2014-15 acts as both the baseline and the first year incremental targets.

Option B - 100 percent proficiency

Under the State’s original ESEA flex plan

Subgroup	Baseline 2010-11	Year 1 2011-12	Year2 2012-13	Year3 2013-14	Year4 2014-15	Year 5 2015-16	Year 6 2016-17	Year7 2017-18	Year8 2018-19	Year9 2019-20
All Students	40	46.7	53.4	60.1	66.8	73.5	80.2	86.9	93.6	100

Note: States then apply the same method by subgroup.

Resetting AMO’s following administration of new assessments in 2014-2015.

Subgroup	Baseline 2014-15	Year I 2014-15	Year2 2015-16	Year3 2016-17	Year4 2017-18	Year 5 2018-19	Year 6 2019-20	Year7 2020-21	Year8 2021-22	Year9 2022-23
All Students	40	46.7	53.4	60.1	66.8	73.5	80.2	86.9	93.6	100

Notes: States then apply the same method by subgroup. 2014-15 acts as both the baseline and the first year of incremental targets.

District, school, and subgroup AMOs

This requires the 2014-2015 to act as both the baseline and the first year of incremental targets. In either option above, if the State is establishing targets for each district, school, and subgroup, the State needs a method to establish targets for 2014-2015. For example, for reporting against 2014-2015 assessment results, the State could use the LEA average to establish school-level targets and use the State average to establish LEA-level targets. States may also propose other methods to establish targets for 2014-2015 for review by ED.

Attachment B: Calculating Safe Harbor

Safe harbor equipercentile calculation example

- The percentage of 3rd-grade students proficient or above statewide on the new assessments in 2014-2015 is 60 percent.
- The State determines the scale score on the previous assessment (either 2013-2014 or the most recent available data) at which 60 percent of the students scored. For this example, 60 percent of 3rd graders scored a 250 or higher.
- The State uses this information to calculate safe harbor for any district, school, or subgroup.
- For School A:
 - Percentage of 3rd grade students scoring a 250 or higher in 2013-2014: 45 percent.
 - Percentage of non-proficient in 2013-2014: 55 percent.
 - 10 percent reduction in the percentage non-proficient = $(55 * .1) = 5.5$ percent.
 - Safe harbor target for 2014-2015 = $45 + 5.5 = 50.5$ percent
 - Percentage of students scoring proficient or above in 2014-2015 = 52 percent
 - School A made AYP via safe harbor