



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

June 23, 2015

The Honorable Richard Woods
State School Superintendent
Georgia Department of Education
205 Jesse Hill Jr. Drive, SE
Atlanta, GA 30034

Dear Superintendent Woods:

I am writing in response to Georgia's request for renewal of flexibility under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended (ESEA), so that Georgia may continue to implement ESEA flexibility.

Our team, including my staff and other senior leaders at the U.S. Department of Education (ED), reviewed Georgia's request dated June 12, 2015. Pursuant to section 9401(d)(2) of the ESEA, I am pleased to renew approval of Georgia's ESEA flexibility request for three years, through the end of the 2017–2018 school year.

My decision to renew approval of Georgia's ESEA flexibility request is based on my determination that ESEA flexibility has been effective in enabling Georgia to carry out important reforms to improve student achievement and that this renewal is in the public interest. With this renewal, Georgia will be able to continue implementing its plans to promote innovative, locally tailored strategies to improve educational outcomes for all students, close achievement gaps, increase equity, and improve the quality of instruction. Georgia's approved request will be posted on ED's website.

This letter also provides my approval of Georgia's proposed amendments to Principle 2 of its ESEA flexibility request, except for one pending amendment. A summary of Georgia's significant approved amendments is enclosed with this letter.

Georgia continues to have an affirmative responsibility to ensure that it and its local educational agencies (LEAs) 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.

400 MARYLAND AVE., SW, WASHINGTON, DC 20202
<http://www.ed.gov/>

I am confident that Georgia will continue to implement the reforms described in its approved ESEA flexibility request and advance its efforts to hold schools and LEAs 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 Eric Larson or Jamila Smith of my staff at: OSS.Georgia@ed.gov.

Thank you for your commitment and continued focus on enhancing education for all students in Georgia.

Sincerely,

A solid black rectangular box redacting the signature of Heather Rieman.

Heather Rieman
Acting Assistant Secretary

Enclosure

cc: Melissa Fincher, Deputy Superintendent for Assessment and Accountability

Pending Amendment to Georgia's ESEA Flexibility Request

Georgia intends to submit an amendment that fully develops the State's plan for enhanced inclusion of newly arrived English learners (ELs) in its accountability system. Georgia's amendment will: (1) provide details about the quantity of bonus points a school may earn in its accountability system based on newly arrived ELs' performance on the English Language Arts (ELA) State assessment if their performance meets or exceeds a predicted score that is based on English language proficiency levels; and (2) demonstrate how newly arrived ELs' performance on the ELA assessment might impact a school's index score calculations. The U.S Department of Education (ED) will work with Georgia in considering this forthcoming amendment request.

Approved Amendments to Georgia's ESEA Flexibility Request

The following is a summary of significant approved amendments to Georgia's ESEA flexibility request. ED approves these amendments because Georgia'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/ga.html>) for Georgia's complete ESEA flexibility request.

- **State-Developed Differentiated Recognition, Accountability, and Support (Principle 2)**

Revision: Georgia will no longer identify Alert Schools and will support other Title I schools through the assignment of a school effectiveness specialist.

Revision: Georgia updated its identification methodology for Highest Performing Reward Schools and High Progress Reward Schools. Highest Performing Reward Schools are now identified based on a three-year average of the Content Mastery category performance for all Title I schools. High Progress Reward Schools are now identified based on a three-year average of the Progress score for all Title I schools. The updated methodology aligns with Georgia's College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) calculations.

Revision: Georgia updated its identification methodology for Priority Schools. These schools are now identified based on a three-year average of the Content Mastery category performance for all Title I schools. The updated methodology aligns with Georgia's CCRPI calculations. A Priority School is also identified if it has a four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate that is less than 60 percent in both of the previous two years.

Revision: Georgia updated its exit criteria for Priority Schools. To exit Priority status, a school will need to demonstrate that it has not met the definition of a Priority School and show a five percentage-point increase in its Content Mastery category performance. A Priority School identified based on graduation rate will be able to exit when it no longer meets the definition of a Priority School and has a graduation rate greater than or equal to 60 percent during the most recent year and prior year, based on a 4-year adjusted cohort rate.

Revision: Georgia updated its identification methodology for Focus Schools. These schools are now identified based on a three-year average of the Achievement Gap score for all Title I schools. The updated methodology aligns with Georgia's CCRPI calculations.

Revision: Georgia updated its exit criteria for Focus Schools. To exit Focus status, a school will need to demonstrate that it has not met the definition of a Focus School and show a 2.5 point increase in its three-year average of Achievement Gap scores.

Revision: Georgia now requires each LEA identified as a Priority District to set aside up to five percent for districtwide professional learning to support improved instruction and increased student achievement for all schools within the LEA.