

9. How can I get more involved?

Between now and February 21st, you can still provide input and feedback by attending community meetings and providing comments on the full draft that OSSE will soon publish. You could also attend the public State Board of Education meeting scheduled for Wednesday, January 25, 2012 at 441 4th Street NW. Now and after the plan is submitted and approved, you can work with your school and district on implementing effective learning plans that help students become college and career ready.

Elementary & Secondary Education Act (Flexibility Waiver)

FAQs



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Office of the
State Superintendent of Education (OSSE)

1. What is ESEA Flexibility?

Schools in the District of Columbia have the opportunity to be released from some of the federal government's requirements under the 2001 No Child Left Behind law if DC develops a comprehensive plan that covers four topics. These four topics are: college- and career-ready standards, accountability and support systems, teacher and principal effectiveness, and decreasing paperwork burdens on schools. While No Child Left Behind law ensures that schools focus on the success of all students, many people agree that certain pieces of the law are not working.

2. What does this flexibility mean for me?

This flexibility is provided by the U.S. Department of Education in exchange for DC leading efforts to raise standards and focus on college and careers, help teachers and principals focus on teaching and learning, and improve all schools, especially the lowest-performing schools and schools with the largest achievement gaps. The benefits include:

- **For Students** – A system that measures student growth and critical thinking to inspire better teaching and greater student engagement across a well-rounded curriculum.
- **For Parents** – Accurate and descriptive information about their children's progress and honest accountability that recognizes and rewards success and – where schools fall short – targeted and focused strategies for the students most at risk.
- **For Teachers** – A collaborative learning culture where teachers can target instruction toward the needs of students and offer a well-rounded curriculum. Fair and responsible evaluations that are based on multiple measures including peer review, principal observation, and classroom work.
- **For Principals** – Greater flexibility to tailor solutions to the unique educational challenges of their students and recognition for progress and performance.

3. What is the Office of the State Superintendent of Education's role related to ESEA Flexibility?

The Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) has the primary responsibility for developing a flexibility plan for DC that serves our students, will be approved by the U.S. Department of Education, and is supported widely enough to ensure we'll be able to implement the plan well. The next deadline for submitting this plan is Tuesday, February 21, 2012. Once the plan is approved – hopefully before this summer – OSSE has to make sure school districts and schools in DC fulfill their responsibilities within the plan so all students in all schools have the opportunity to succeed.

4. Which federal requirements will be waived in exchange for the District of Columbia's plan?

In exchange for a comprehensive plan from DC, the U.S. Department of Education will release DC schools from several specific requirements, including:

- The requirement for 100% of students to achieve proficiency by 2013-14,
- Current identification of schools as "schools in need of improvement," and
- One-size-fits-all interventions in all schools in need of improvement.

5. How will schools be held accountable for raising performance and closing achievement gaps?

ESEA flexibility will not give schools a pass on accountability, but instead will continue to require schools to raise the bar for performance for all students and to hold schools accountable for the academic growth of all students. This flexibility will let DC move forward with a better system that considers student growth and school progress, provides recognition and support, and focuses the most dramatic interventions where they are most needed. Instead of schools being forced to implement one-size-fits-all interventions, DC's plan will reaffirm the responsibility of individual schools to constantly adjust strategies to ensure that all students become ready for college or careers, with the most attention on the schools needing the most improvement.

6. How will DC's plan ensure that the lowest-performing schools improve?

One specific place where the requirements of No Child Left Behind failed to help DC students succeed is within the schools that have been doing the worst. However, under a new School Improvement Grant program and with extra one-time funding under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, including for Race to the Top, the persistently lowest-performing schools in DC have started intensive school turnaround interventions. The flexibility plan will expand upon this good start, requiring the "bottom 5%" of schools to use their federal funds to support whole-school turnaround so that these sites of continued failure live up to their responsibilities.

7. How does this plan fit within broader initiatives here in DC and beyond?

This plan reaffirms that schools and school districts in DC are responsible for their students' achievement, providing them with flexibility from current requirements so they can implement the plans that they believe will lead to the greatest improvements. It also highlights the special roles in leading education reform in DC of both the District of Columbia Public Schools and the District of Columbia Public Charter School Board, which has oversight over all public charter schools in its role as the sole authorizer of these schools. Third, this plan clearly outlines the role OSSE plays in holding all schools to the same standards, providing additional support to schools, and making sure that low-performing schools create and implement plans to improve. The plan links directly to work already underway, including through Race to the Top, and over 40 states are working on their own plans, reflecting consensus that change is needed.

8. How is OSSE gathering and using community input and feedback to create a comprehensive plan?

Since November of last year, OSSE has talked with all different individuals and community groups of people to gather ideas, input, and feedback to create the best plan possible for District students. Over 50 meetings on ESEA Flexibility have been held, with more to come. In January, OSSE will release a full draft of its plan to specifically ask DC local educational agencies (or school districts) to comment on the draft so that OSSE and State Superintendent Hosanna Mahaley can make final revisions and submit the plan to the U.S. Department of Education by Tuesday, February 21st.