



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

OFFICE OF THE STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF

EDUCATION

PROPOSED WAIVER REQUEST: District of Columbia Waiver Request- Targeted Support I Schools & Administration of Statewide Assessment in Science

OSSE is providing this draft letter that outlines its waiver request from the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESSA) from provisions relating to targeted support I schools and the administration of statewide assessments in science. In order to request a waiver to the US Department of Education, states must make waiver requests available to the public for notice and comment consistent with 20 U.S.C. §7861. OSSE will submit received comments with the waiver request to USED upon submission. Comments may be submitted until January 22, 2021 by submitting them to dcschoolreportcard@dc.gov.

February 1, 2021

Secretary Betsy DeVos
Lyndon Baines Johnson (LBJ)
Department of Education Building
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Secretary DeVos:

As the District of Columbia responds to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) continues to prioritize the public health and safety of students and educators. At the same time, as the state education agency for the District of Columbia, we remain committed to providing accurate and actionable school performance data to use in our efforts to support and improve the performance of our schools. To better support our efforts, the District of Columbia requests waivers of two (2) provisions of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act pursuant to the process outlined in sec. 8401 (20 U.S.C §7861).

Waiver Request 1: Annual Targeted Support School Designations

Describes which Federal statutory and regulatory requirements are to be waived

Sec. 1111(d)(2)(A) and sec. 1111(h)(1)(C)(i)(V) of the ESSA requires states to annually identify and report schools for targeted support and improvement. Specifically, schools with consistently underperforming subgroup(s) are referred to as Targeted Support 1 (TS1) in the District of Columbia's State ESSA Plan. OSSE designates schools as TS 1 when one or more subgroup is determined to be consistently underperforming as defined in the plan. OSSE requests a targeted, two-year waiver of this statutory requirement for TSI identifications utilizing data from the 2020-2021 and 2021-22 school years.

Describes how the waiving of such requirements will advance student academic achievement

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and to protect the health and welfare of students and educators, OSSE received a waiver from assessments and accountability requirements of sections 1111(b)(2), 1111(c)(4), and 1111(d)(2)(C)-(D) of ESSA for the 2019-2020 school year; therefore, OSSE did not calculate overall accountability scores and ratings on its system of annual meaningful differentiation, the School Transparency and Reporting (STAR) Framework. Further, it is not possible to calculate academic progress as defined in the District's ESSA plan because statewide assessment data is unavailable for the 2019-20 school year. The academic progress indicators carry the highest weight in our system of annual meaningful differentiation for elementary and middle schools making these metrics necessary to measuring overall performance. Currently, all identified TS 1 schools are elementary and middle schools, and as such, this component is critical to include in these calculations for comparability and equity across years. Additionally, changes in assessment administration to accommodate remote and in-person learning will impact available data from the 2020-21 school year further complicating the ability to implement the accountability system as outlined in the ESSA State Plan.

Describes the methods the State educational agency, local educational agency, school, or Indian tribe will use to monitor and regularly evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation of the plan

OSSE will monitor and regularly evaluate its ability to come back into full compliance with its submitted state plan. OSSE is committed to collecting assessment data and working with its stakeholders to determine how best to use them in improving programs and supports for all students and schools. OSSE intends to continue to review the available data, provide meaningful information to schools and the public related to the performance of schools and direct additional supports to help address learning gaps. It is anticipated that DC will be able to resume the identification of consistently underperforming subgroups based on the system of annual meaningful differentiation used for statewide accountability, known as the STAR Framework, using data from the 2021 -22, and 2022-23 school years. Until new TS1 identifications can be made, OSSE will continue to provide resources and support to those schools and LEAs with subgroups currently identified with TS1 status in the same manner as identified in the ESSA State Plan. OSSE will continue to provide performance data and school, LEA, and state-level information- as available- on the DC School Report Card (www.dcschoolreportcard.org) and in additional data publications and reports available on the OSSE website.

Waiver Request 2: Science Assessment Administration

Describes which Federal statutory and regulatory requirements are to be waived

Sec. 1111(b)(2) (20 U.S.C. 6311) of the ESEA which requires states to administer and report results for the statewide assessment in science based on the state's academic standards. OSSE requests a targeted one-year waiver from this provision.

Describes how the waiving of such requirements will advance student academic achievement

The District of Columbia administers a statewide science assessment to students all public schools in grades 5, 8, and once in high school as required by the statute. During the 2018-19 school year, the District administered a brand new science assessment, which was developed by local educators and is unique to the needs of the District. Due to the assessment and accountability waivers and the closures of schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020, the District did not administer statewide assessments. As a result, the administration in the 2018-19 school year was the first and only time this

assessment was given as an operational field test. OSSE published results from the first year of this assessment in December 2019 on the DC School Report Card.

Given the infancy of the DC Science Assessment and the fact that the assessment can only be administered in-person, we neither have the item bank available nor the historical data needed to assess and meaningfully interpret results in the 2020-21 school year. Further, attempting to do so could jeopardize the quality and integrity of the new assessment program thus threatening academic achievement in science.

Describes the methods the State educational agency, local educational agency, school, or Indian tribe will use to monitor and regularly evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation of the plan

OSSE is committed to continuing to support school and LEA implementation of the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). During the 2020-21 school year, OSSE is focusing resources on training and professional development opportunities that will allow science educators to gain a deeper understanding of how the NGSS translate to assessments. In addition, OSSE is providing tools and supports to create NGSS-aligned classroom tasks and assessments. The District intends to resume the administration of Statewide assessments in science in the 2021-22 school year.

Despite the unprecedented challenge of coronavirus (COVID-19), the District of Columbia remains committed to providing the DC education community with high-quality information and performance data about our schools. First and foremost, our priority at OSSE is the health and safety of students and educators. The pandemic has had a significant impact on our students, families and schools in the District. We believe it is important to have comparable, valid, and reliable data which measures how our students are doing academically as well as how our schools are supporting student learning. OSSE is committed to reviewing all available data, as well as working with our stakeholders and will continue to provide information that is both meaningful as well as useful in improving programs and supports for all students and schools.

We appreciate your attention to this matter. Enclosed you will find the public comments submitted in response to this waiver request.

Sincerely,

Shana Young
Interim State Superintendent

Enclosures