



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

OFFICE OF THE STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF

EDUCATION

February 23, 2016

Dear LEA Leaders,

As you know, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed by President Obama on December 10, 2015. ESSA reauthorizes the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and replaces the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001. Since the law's adoption, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) has been analyzing the impact of this new law at the state, local education agency (LEA) and school level. As we transition to its new requirements, we are committed to keeping LEAs and other stakeholders informed. To that end, I am writing to provide you an update about our plans related to the implementation of the District of Columbia's (DC's) current school accountability system as we move forward with this transition, and specifically, the status of school classifications.

Currently, DC's school accountability system is dictated by DC's Flexibility Waiver to ESEA. The Waiver will be in place until August 1, 2016, at which time it will be replaced by ESSA. As you are aware, our Waiver outlines a school accountability system that identifies schools into one of five classification categories based on school performance. Two categories—Priority and Focus—exist to identify the lowest performing schools (Priority) and schools with the largest achievement gaps (Focus). While these school classification categories are maintained in ESSA, the law also provides for states to develop new accountability systems aligned with ESSA requirements in consultation with stakeholders.

As part of its transition efforts to ESSA, on December 18, 2015 the Department of Education (ED) issued new guidance.¹ Within this guidance, state education agencies (SEAs) were provided two options regarding their lists of Priority and Focus schools for the 2016-17 school year. These options were:

Option A: Do not exit schools and maintain current school classifications. Within this option, a State would opt to “freeze” its current lists of Priority and Focus schools as of December 10, 2015 (the date of the law's enactment). These schools would continue to implement their approved interventions through the 2015–16 and 2016–17 school years. The State would not be able to exit schools from the current lists until after the 2016–17 school year.

Option B: Exit schools and identify new Priority and Focus schools. Within this option, a State may exit Priority and Focus schools that meet the State's approved exit criteria and identify new Priority and Focus schools based on more recent data. A State selecting this option would

¹ The new guidance from ED can be found here: <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/transition-dcl.pdf>

be required to provide updated lists of Priority and Focus schools to the Department by Monday, March 1, 2016, using the data available at that time (i.e., year one PARCC results).

We recognize that neither of these options is optimal for DC, as our original commitment to LEAs included use of the second year of the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) results to re-classify schools after a baseline was established in the first year. OSSE engaged in discussions with the Department to request the addition of this option; however, the Department has indicated that there is no flexibility and that all States must choose between the options provided.

Based on analysis of these options, OSSE will maintain current school classifications, including the existing lists of Priority and Focus schools, for continued implementation in the 2016-17 school year. The current list of DC's Priority and Focus schools is available at <http://osse.dc.gov/publication/sy-2015-16-priority-and-focus-schools>.²

During this time, we are committed to working with you to ensure our ongoing support and oversight provide flexibility based on current performance data and take into account demonstrated progress. We would also like to explore with you ways to recognize and communicate demonstrated progress. We will be reaching out to LEA leadership and staff with proposals to this effect in the coming months.

We will continue to communicate as additional information is available on ESSA and look forward to partnering with you to develop an accountability system aligned with the new law. Please feel free to contact me or my deputy chief of staff, Jessie Harteis, who may be reached at 202-344-9805 or Jessie.Harteis@dc.gov, with any questions. Thank you for your continued partnership on behalf of DC's schools and students.

Sincerely,



Hanseul Kang
State Superintendent of Education

² All school classifications are available on www.learndc.org. Select "find a school profile" and then "performance" from the left menu bar.