UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY

MAY 13 2008

The Honorable Barbara Thompson
Interim Commissioner of Education
Alaska Department of Education & Early Development
Goldbelt Place
801 West Tenth Street, Suite 200
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1894

Dear Commissioner Thompson:

Thank you for submitting a differentiated accountability proposal to the U.S. Department of Education (Department). Through this pilot, the Department hopes to discover various approaches to differentiation that produce more targeted and effective interventions for schools and school districts in need of improvement.

The Department has reviewed Alaska's differentiated accountability proposal and has decided to forward the proposal for peer review. As explained by the Secretary in her letter on March 20, 2008, to participate in the pilot, states must commit to build their own capacity for school reform, take the most significant actions for the lowest-performing schools, and use data to determine the method of differentiation. The Department will take into consideration a number of issues before approving any proposal.

As noted in the Secretary's letter, priority for participation in the pilot will be given to states that have at least 20 percent of their Title I schools identified as in need of improvement in the 2007-08 school year; states that propose substantive and comprehensive interventions for the lowest-performing schools and school districts (i.e. restructuring); and states that propose an innovative model of differentiation and interventions.

I also want to provide you with additional information about how we will handle the next steps in the review and approval process. First, the peers will independently review each state's proposal. As the peers review each proposal, they may seek clarifications. Consequently, to the extent necessary, we may facilitate a conference call between your staff and the peer review team some time during the week of May 19-23. In the meantime, we will post all of the states' submissions on our website at: http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/differentiatedaccountability/index.html. The posting of the submissions on our website will help ensure that this process is open and transparent to all those concerned.

The peer reviewers will meet in Washington, DC on June 13-14 to discuss each proposal. During this meeting, the Department may request more information or facilitate another conference call between the peer reviewers and your staff to discuss any necessary additional

clarifications regarding your proposal. The peer reviewers will document their comments on each proposal and each state will receive a copy of these peer notes. Following their review, the peers will make recommendations to the Secretary.

The Department intends to complete the approval process in time for approved states to apply their differentiated accountability model in the 2008-09 school year for AYP determinations based on assessment results from the 2007-08 school year.

Again, I appreciate your work on the proposal and your continued efforts to ensure quality education for all children.

Sincerely,

Kerri L. Briggs, Ph.D.

cc: Governor Sara Palin
Margaret MacKinnon