UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

MAR 10 2006

THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY

Mr. Roger Sampson
Commissioner of Education
Alaska Department of Education & Early Development
Goldbelt Place
801 West Tenth Street, Suite 200
Juneau, AK 99801-1894

Dear Commissioner Sampson:

Thank you for submitting a proposal for consideration to participate in the Secretary's growth model pilot, which will allow selected States to use a growth-based accountability model to meet the goals of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Each proposal is being reviewed internally to determine how well it meets the seven core principles laid out in the Secretary's November 21, 2005 letter, making it eligible to advance to peer review.

The initial review of Alaska's proposal indicates additional information is needed to determine how it meets the seven core principles. I remind you that an expected result from the pilot project is the ability to analyze how growth serves as a measure of accountability in comparison to the current status model. In accordance with Principle 4, such a comparison is only possible when a growth model and its growth targets are applied to all students and not only to students who missed the proficiency target. As we discussed in our March 9, 2006 phone call, please provide information to answer the following questions found in the Department's peer review guidance (please see www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/growthmodelguidance.doc for that information). The reference in parenthesis is to that particular element in the guidance document:

Principle 1. Universal Proficiency

- Has the State proposed technically and educationally sound criteria for "growth targets" for schools and subgroups? (Principle 1.2)
  - What are the State's "growth targets" relative to the goal of 100% of students proficient by 2013-14? (Principle 1.2.1)
    - Please provide cut scores for each performance level on the State assessment.
- Has the State proposed a technically and educationally sound method of making annual judgments about school performance using growth? (Principle 1.3)
  - Has the State adequately described how annual accountability determinations will incorporate student growth? (Principle 1.3.1)
    - Clarify how the standard deviation mentioned on page 3 of the proposal pertains to the assessment performance levels.

        - Please provide a rationale for the application of the confidence interval.

Principle 4: Inclusion of All Students

- Does the State's proposed growth model address the inclusion of all students, subgroups and schools appropriately? (Principle 4.1)
    - Does the State's growth model address the inclusion of all students appropriately? (Principle 4.1.1)
        - Please clarify whether the growth model will be applied to all students in every school in the State.
        - Please clarify how the model applies full academic year and how growth will be attributed to students transitioning from elementary school to middle school, and middle school to high school.

Principle 6: Tracking Student Progress

- Has the State designed and implemented a technically and educationally sound system for accurately matching student data from one year to the next? (Principle 6.1)
    - What evidence will the State provide to ensure that match rates are sufficiently high and also not significantly different by subgroup? (Principle 6.1.2)
        - Provide additional information on match rates for subgroups of students.
    - What quality assurance procedures are used to maintain accuracy of the student matching system? (Principle 6.1.3)
        - Provide additional information regarding quality assurance procedures used to maintain the accuracy of the student matching system.
    - Does the State student data system include information indicating demographic characteristics (e.g, ethnic/race category), disability status, and socio-economic status (e.g., participation in free/reduced price lunch)? (Principle 6.1.5)
        - Please provide additional information regarding the inclusion of demographic information in the State data system.

As we discussed in our March 9, 2006 phone call, please be aware that the Secretary has concerns with a State's status and growth models that use differentiated subgroup sizes for different subgroups. The additional information you provide will be considered an addendum to Alaska's original application and will be included in the review process for the pilot. **The information should be submitted no later than March 17, 2006.** Please provide the information to Dr. Catherine Freeman at catherine.freeman@ed.gov.

I appreciate your interest in the growth model pilot. If you have any questions regarding this request, please contact Dr. Freeman at the email address above or by calling (202) 401-0113. I thank you in advance for your response.

Sincerely,

Henry L. Johnson

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cc: Les Morse