



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

JUL 23 2015

The Honorable Michael Hanley  
Commissioner  
Alaska Department of Education & Early Development  
PO Box 110500  
Juneau, AK 99811

Dear Commissioner Hanley:

I am writing in response to Alaska's request for renewal of flexibility under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended (ESEA flexibility), so that Alaska may continue to implement ESEA flexibility.

Our team, including my staff and other senior leaders at the U.S. Department of Education (ED), reviewed Alaska's request dated July 2, 2015. Pursuant to section 9401(d)(2) of the ESEA, I am pleased to approve the renewal of Alaska's ESEA flexibility request for three years, through the end of the 2017–2018 school year.

My decision to approve the renewal of Alaska's ESEA flexibility request is based on my determination that ESEA flexibility has been effective in enabling Alaska to carry out important reforms to improve student achievement and that this renewal is in the public interest. With this renewal, Alaska will be able to continue implementing its plans to promote innovative, locally tailored strategies to improve educational outcomes for all students, close achievement gaps, increase equity, and improve the quality of instruction. Alaska's approved request will be posted on ED's website.

This letter also provides my approval of Alaska's amendments to its ESEA flexibility request. A summary of Alaska's significant approved amendment is enclosed with this letter.

I have also determined that Alaska's guidelines for teacher and principal evaluation and support systems meet the requirements for Principle 3 as articulated in ED's June 7, 2012 document titled, *ESEA Flexibility*.

This renewal is subject to Alaska's commitment to:

- Amend its request by January 31, 2016, to include a rule that a school in Alaska may not receive the highest rating in Alaska's differentiated recognition, accountability, and support system if there are significant achievement or graduation rate gaps that are not closing in the school.
- Demonstrate, during ED's monitoring and follow-up of ESEA flexibility implementation, that Alaska is implementing the plan set forth in its ESEA flexibility request, including timeline and

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milestones, that will lead to inclusion of student growth in the teacher and principal evaluation and support systems based on State assessments administered no later than the 2016–2017 school year and each year thereafter.

Alaska continues to have an affirmative responsibility to ensure that it and its local educational agencies (LEAs) are in compliance with Federal civil rights laws that prohibit discrimination based on race, color, national origin, sex, disability and age in their implementation of ESEA flexibility. These laws include Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, and requirements under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

I am confident that Alaska will continue to implement the reforms described in its approved ESEA flexibility request and advance its efforts to hold schools and LEAs accountable for the achievement of all students. If you need any additional assistance to implement your ESEA flexibility request, please do not hesitate to contact Robyn Pettiford or Robert Salley of my staff at: [OSS.Alaska@ed.gov](mailto:OSS.Alaska@ed.gov).

Thank you for your commitment and continued focus on enhancing education for all students in Alaska.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ann Whalen', written in a cursive style.

Ann Whalen  
Delegated the authority to perform the functions  
and duties of Assistant Secretary for Elementary  
and Secondary Education

Enclosure

cc: Margaret MacKinnon, Acting Director of Assessments and Accountability

## Approved Amendment to Alaska's ESEA Flexibility Request

The following is a summary of the significant approved amendment that Alaska included as part of its request for renewal of ESEA flexibility. ED approves this amendment because Alaska's ESEA flexibility request, as amended, continues to be aligned with the principles of ESEA flexibility. Please refer to ED's website (<http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/esea-flexibility/map/ak.html>) for Alaska's complete ESEA flexibility request.

- **State-Developed Differentiated Recognition, Accountability, and Support (Principle 2):**

Revision: Alaska will not assign schools new ratings under Alaska's differentiated recognition, accountability, and support system based on assessments administered in the 2014–2015 school year. Alaska will resume assigning school ratings based on assessments administered in the 2015–2016 school year.