



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

April 6, 2021

The Honorable Angelica Allen-McMillan
Commissioner
New Jersey Department of Education
P.O. Box 500
Trenton, NJ 08625-0500

Dear Commissioner Allen-McMillan:

I am writing in response to the New Jersey Department of Education's (NJDOE's) request on March 18, 2021, for a waiver of section 1111(b)(2)(B)(i) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) that the State administer its academic assessments to all public elementary and secondary school students in the State and the related State and local report cards requirements in section 1111(h) of the ESEA. As part of this request, NJDOE noted that its "Strong Start" initiative will include a shortened version of its reading/language arts, mathematics, and science assessments in the fall.

The Department remains committed to supporting all States in assessing the learning of all students. Obtaining data on student learning includes high-quality statewide assessments, which can help identify where opportunity gaps are persistent and have been exacerbated – particularly during the pandemic – and, along with other data, can help States direct resources and support to close those gaps. At the same time, we must also recognize that we are in the midst of a pandemic that requires real flexibility.

I appreciate the information that your staff shared with our staff about the approach you are considering in New Jersey. Based on the information you have provided, I understand that your Strong Start statewide summative assessment is built on the State's assessment framework and will result in information that is reported to individual parents and the public and that meets the other requirements of the ESEA. In addition, NJDOE will continue to administer the alternate assessments in reading/language arts, mathematics, and science and the English language proficiency (ELP) assessments this spring. Therefore, the Department does not believe that a waiver is needed at this time.

We appreciate the challenges you, your school districts, and your schools are facing this year. Having assessment data that are based on your State's academic and content standards for as many students as possible is important to provide useful information to parents, educators, and the public, and to address existing and increased gaps in opportunity. If you have any questions, please contact me or my staff at ESEA.Assessment@ed.gov.

Sincerely,

/s/

Ian Rosenblum
Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy and Programs
Delegated the Authority to Perform the Functions and
Duties of the Assistant Secretary Office of Elementary and
Secondary Education

cc: Jesse Young, NJDOE

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