Feds Okay Eight Additional States for Waivers

Eighteen More States Still Await Department’s Approval

The U.S. Department of Education (Department) recently announced eight additional states that received approvals on their applications to be waived from certain requirements under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The eight states (Connecticut, Delaware, Louisiana, Maryland, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, and Rhode Island) join 11 other states (Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Tennessee) that, in return for increased flexibility, are required to ensure their students are college-and-career-ready, implement differentiated accountability systems that provide tailored interventions to their schools and students that need it the most, and support effective teachers and leaders.

Eighteen states (Arkansas, Arizona, District of Columbia, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, Nevada, Oregon, South Carolina, South Dakota, Utah, Virginia, Washington, Wisconsin) are still waiting for approval from the Department. Vermont applied in the second round, by the state board of education rescinded its application, primarily because of a disagreement with the Department on the state’s frequency of assessing its students. The state desires to assess its students every other year as opposed to every year. The state wants to use local assessments and other measures to gauge student achievement during the off-years.

Except for Connecticut, all of the approved states received some funding from the Department’s Race to the Top Program competition that requires states to implement college-and career-ready standards and assessments, implement comprehensive data systems, support teacher and leader effectiveness, and improve their lowest-performing schools. The District of Columbia is the only Race to the Top Program grantee that applied in the second round and is still waiting on a waiver. Hawaii is the only Race to the Top Program grantee that did not apply for the second round of waivers.

Below are highlights from the applications of each of the states approved in the second round.

Connecticut

Connecticut plans to transition students with disabilities to general state assessments by 2014-15. It also is requiring schools that are in turnaround status to make significant progress before exiting that status, and only after implementing turnaround strategies for three years. It also lowered the minimum size of a student demographic group that must be tracked for accountability purposes to 20 students (down from 40).

Delaware

Delaware also moved to increase the number of student subgroups used for accountability purposes by reducing the minimum size of a subgroup from 40 to 30. The state also emphasizes the performance of subgroups for its schools to exit the “focus” category of schools. The state also aligned its waiver reform agenda with its Race to the Top reform agenda.
Louisiana

Louisiana is committed to refining and improving its statewide teacher evaluation system based on results from its current pilot teacher evaluation system. The state is implementing a graduation index based on four-year cohort graduation rates, five-year cohort graduation rates, and the number of GEDs.

Maryland

The state is committed to transitioning students with disabilities to general state assessments by the 2012-2013 school year. The Department acknowledged its current work in its pilot teacher evaluation system and its commitment to refine and improve the statewide system based on pilot results.

North Carolina

North Carolina is committed to its teacher evaluation system in which teachers are required to meet all aspects of their evaluations, including student growth. The state detailed specific consequences for schools that repeatedly fail to meet the target participation rate of students on state tests of 95 percent.

New York

The state outlined how teacher evaluations will inform professional development. As with North Carolina, New York said it would consequences for those schools not meeting participation rates on state exams. In addition, in order to exit “focus” school status, a school must exceed the standards used to initially identify “focus” schools, and must also increase its scores on a performance index.

Ohio

The U.S. Department of Education will want to see the Ohio legislature pass legislation that reflects ensures the state is moving forward with implementation of its differentiated accountability system. The state is committed to including graduation rates in its accountability system for schools. The state also outlined how it will implement a statewide support network for all schools and how it will provide technical assistance to “priority” and “focus” schools.

Rhode Island

Like other approved states, Rhode Island is implementing increased consequences for schools’ that fail to meet certain state test participation rates. It also elaborated on the idea of the “super-subgroup” it would use for accountability purposes by identifying how it would use stakeholders to support advocates of the various demographics included in that larger group.

The Department will announce additional approved states from the second round in the coming weeks. The Department has scheduled a third round window for waiver applications for September 6. A small handful of states are expected to apply during that round.

Resources


Education Week – “State EdWatch Blog” - blogs.edweek.org/edweek/state_edwatch/2012/05/.