

PRINCIPLES FOR IMPROVING STUDENT ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AND INCREASING THE QUALITY OF INSTRUCTION

To receive flexibility through the waivers outlined above, an SEA must submit a request that addresses each of the following four principles, consistent with the definitions and timelines described later in this document, to increase the quality of instruction for students and improve student academic achievement in the State and its LEAs. In the SEA's request, the SEA must describe how it will ensure that LEAs will fully implement these principles, consistent with the SEA's authority under State law and the SEA's request.

1. College- and Career-Ready Expectations for All Students

Over the past few years, Governors and Chief State School Officers have developed and adopted rigorous academic content standards to prepare all students for success in college and careers in the 21st century. States are also coming together to develop the next generation of assessments aligned with these new standards, and to advance essential skills that promote critical thinking, problem solving, and the application of knowledge. To support States in continuing the work of transitioning students, teachers, and schools to a system aligned to college and career ready expectations, this flexibility would remove obstacles that hinder that work.

To receive this flexibility, an SEA must demonstrate that it has college- and career-ready expectations for all students in the State by adopting **college- and career-ready standards** in at least reading/language arts and mathematics, transitioning to and implementing such standards statewide for all students and schools, and developing and administering annual, statewide, aligned, **high-quality assessments**, and corresponding academic achievement standards, that measure **student growth** in at least grades 3-8 and at least once in high school. An SEA must also support English Learners in reaching such standards by committing to adopt English language proficiency (ELP) standards that correspond to its college- and career-ready standards and that reflect the academic language skills necessary to access and meet the new college- and career-ready standards, and committing to develop and administer aligned ELP assessments. To ensure that its college- and career-ready standards are truly aligned with postsecondary expectations, and to provide information to parents and students about the college-readiness rates of local schools, an SEA must annually report to the public on college-going and college credit-accumulation rates for all students and student subgroups in each LEA and each high school in the State.

2. State-Developed Differentiated Recognition, Accountability, and Support

Fair, flexible, and focused accountability and support systems are critical to continuously improving the academic achievement of all students, closing persistent achievement gaps, and improving equity. Based on the principles for accountability developed by the Council of Chief State School Officers, many States are already moving forward with next-generation systems that recognize student growth and school progress, align accountability determinations with support and capacity-building efforts, and provide for systemic, context-specific interventions that focus on the lowest-performing schools and schools with the largest achievement gaps. This flexibility would give SEAs and LEAs relief from the school and LEA improvement requirements of NCLB so they can implement these new systems.

To receive this flexibility, an SEA must develop and implement a system of differentiated recognition, accountability, and support for all LEAs in the State and for all Title I schools in these LEAs. Those systems must look at student achievement in at least reading/language arts and mathematics for all students and all subgroups of students identified in ESEA section 1111(b)(2)(C)(v)(II); graduation rates for all students and all subgroups; and school performance and progress over time, including the performance and progress of all subgroups. They may also look at student achievement in subjects other than reading/language arts and mathematics, and, once an SEA has adopted high-quality assessments, must take into account student growth. An SEA's system of differentiated recognition, accountability, and support must create incentives and include differentiated interventions and support to improve student achievement and graduation rates and to close achievement gaps for all subgroups, including interventions specifically focused on improving the performance of English Learners and students with disabilities. More specifically, the SEA's system must, at a minimum:

- Set new ambitious but achievable AMOs in at least reading/language arts and mathematics for the State and all LEAs, schools, and subgroups, that provide meaningful goals and are used to guide support and improvement efforts.
- Provide incentives and recognition for success on an annual basis by publicly recognizing and, if possible, rewarding Title I schools making the most progress or having the highest performance as “reward schools.”
- Effect dramatic, systemic change in the lowest-performing schools by publicly identifying “priority schools” and ensuring that each LEA with one or more of these schools implements, for three years, meaningful interventions aligned with the turnaround principles in each of these schools. The SEA must also develop criteria to determine when a school that is making significant progress in improving student achievement exits priority status.
- Work to close achievement gaps by publicly identifying Title I schools with the greatest achievement gaps, or in which subgroups are furthest behind, as “focus schools” and ensuring that each LEA implements interventions, which may include tutoring and public school choice, in each of these schools based on reviews of the specific academic needs of the school and its students. The SEA must also develop criteria to determine when a school that is making significant progress in improving student achievement and narrowing achievement gaps exits focus status.
- Provide incentives and supports to ensure continuous improvement in other Title I schools that, based on the SEA's new AMOs and other measures, are not making progress in improving student achievement and narrowing achievement gaps.
- Build SEA, LEA, and school capacity to improve student learning in all schools and, in particular, in low-performing schools and schools with the largest achievement gaps. The SEA must provide timely and comprehensive monitoring of, and technical assistance for, LEA implementation of interventions in priority and focus schools, and must hold LEAs accountable for improving school and student performance, particularly for turning around their priority schools. The SEA and its LEAs must also ensure sufficient support for implementation of interventions in priority schools, focus schools, and other Title I schools identified under the SEA's differentiated recognition, accountability, and support system (including through leveraging funds the LEA was previously required to reserve under ESEA section 1116(b)(10), SIG funds, and other Federal funds, as permitted, along with State and local resources).

3. Supporting Effective Instruction and Leadership

In recent years, many SEAs and LEAs have begun to develop evaluation systems that go beyond NCLB's minimum HQT standards, provide more meaningful information about the effectiveness of teachers and principals, and can be used to inform professional development and improve practice. High-quality systems, informed by research that affirms that educators have significant and lasting effects on student learning, draw on multiple measures of instructional and leadership practices to evaluate and support teacher and principal effectiveness. This flexibility will give SEAs and LEAs the ability to continue this work designed to increase the quality of instruction for all students by building fair, rigorous evaluation and support systems and developing innovative strategies for using them.

To receive this flexibility, an SEA and each LEA must commit to develop, adopt, pilot, and implement, with the involvement of teachers and principals, teacher and principal evaluation and support systems that: (1) will be used for continual improvement of instruction; (2) meaningfully differentiate performance using at least three performance levels; (3) use multiple valid measures in determining performance levels, including as a significant factor data on student growth for all students (including English Learners and students with disabilities), and other measures of professional practice (which may be gathered through multiple formats and sources, such as observations based on rigorous teacher performance standards, teacher portfolios, and student and parent surveys); (4) evaluate teachers and principals on a regular basis; (5) provide clear, timely, and useful feedback, including feedback that identifies needs and guides professional development; and (6) will be used to inform personnel decisions. An SEA must develop and adopt guidelines for these systems, and LEAs must develop and implement teacher and principal evaluation and support systems that are consistent with the SEA's guidelines. To ensure high-quality implementation, all teachers, principals, and evaluators should be trained on the evaluation system and their responsibilities in the evaluation system. As part of developing and implementing these evaluation and support systems, an SEA must also provide student growth data on current students and the students taught in the previous year to, at a minimum, teachers of reading/language arts and mathematics in grades in which the State administers assessments in those subjects in a manner that is timely and informs instructional programs. Once these evaluation and support systems are in place, an SEA may use data from these systems to meet the requirements of ESEA section 1111(b)(8)(C) that it ensure that poor and minority children are not taught at higher rates than other children by inexperienced, unqualified, or out-of-field teachers.

4. Reducing Duplication and Unnecessary Burden

In order to provide an environment in which schools and LEAs have the flexibility to focus on what's best for students, an SEA should remove duplicative and burdensome reporting requirements that have little or no impact on student outcomes. To receive the flexibility, an SEA must assure that it will evaluate and, based on that evaluation, revise its own administrative requirements to reduce duplication and unnecessary burden on LEAs and schools.

Nothing in these principles shall be construed to alter or otherwise affect the rights, remedies, and procedures afforded school or school district employees under Federal, State, or local laws (including applicable regulations or court orders) or under the terms of collective bargaining agreements, memoranda of understanding, or other agreements between such employees and their employers.