



## Minnesota's NCLB Waiver Request: Frequently Asked Questions

### **Q: What is the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Flexibility Waiver opportunity?**

A: The U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) has created an opportunity for states to take greater control of their system of school accountability by abandoning aspects of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) that have not worked and replacing them with new, state-developed models. [The current reauthorization of ESEA is known as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act.] In order to be granted this flexibility, states must agree to work within a set of principles.

### **Q: What does the USDOE require of states in order to be granted ESEA Flexibility?**

A: States must demonstrate that their accountability systems incorporate four key principles:

1. college- and career-based academic standards
2. differentiated recognition, accountability and support for schools
3. support for effective instruction and leadership
4. reducing duplication and unnecessary burden

### **Q: How would Minnesota meet these requirements?**

A: Minnesota is well-positioned to take advantage of this opportunity because many of the principles required for ESEA Flexibility have already been enacted here. Minnesota has constantly increased the rigor of its standards and is in the process of having them certified as college- and career- ready by the University of Minnesota and Minnesota State Colleges and Universities.

Minnesota's accountability system already has many of the features required by the waiver. Our School Improvement Grant (SIG) program already identifies some of the most persistently low-achieving schools and works with them to implement turnaround models similar to the principles outlined in the federal guidance. There are several other decisions that will have to be made about how to provide differentiated recognition, accountability and support to schools but the state already has many policies and tools in place that will make this possible.

Minnesota also recently adopted a teacher and principal evaluation aligned with what the waiver requires for supporting effective instruction and leadership.

Finally, Minnesota has always strived to reduce burdensome reporting requirements for districts and will be better-positioned to do so if we are granted greater flexibility from federal reporting requirements.

**Q: What would a new Minnesota accountability system look like under the waiver?**

A: Many of the decisions about how to hold schools accountable under a waiver are yet to be made but there are some parameters set by federal guidance. States must identify the five percent of Title I schools that are the most persistently low-achieving as Priority Schools and implement rigorous reform models in those schools. States must also identify the 10 percent of Title I schools that either have low graduation rates, low-performing subgroups or the wide achievement gaps as Focus Schools, and work with districts to improve the performance of those schools. States must also identify an unspecified percentage of Title I schools as Reward Schools based on high levels of achievement or high levels of academic growth. Finally, states must continue to provide incentives and support for Title I schools that do not fall into any of the three designated categories.

**Q: When would these changes take effect?**

A: The major changes to Minnesota's accountability model would be implemented for the 2012-13 school year. There is a possibility that the waiver would allow districts to stop adhering to certain NCLB regulations during the second half of the current school year if Minnesota's request is approved quickly.

**Q: What is the timeline for requesting the waiver?**

A: Since the waiver criteria were announced on September 23, the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) has been working with the USDOE to understand what is required and how Minnesota can take advantage of this new flexibility. MDE will be working with a committee of stakeholders to make decisions about the form that a new accountability system will take with the goal of submitting a request at the first deadline on November 14. The USDOE has said that requests received by the first deadline will be reviewed in December with a determination being given to states early in 2012. The USDOE has also said that no request will be rejected. Rather, they will work with states to improve applications with the goal of approving every state that is interested in taking advantage of the waiver.

**Q: What is the committee of stakeholders?**

A: The committee of stakeholders is a group of individuals representing various groups that have an interest in school accountability. Individuals were invited by MDE Commissioner Brenda Cassellius to participate in the group so that MDE could solicit as much input as possible from groups that have a stake in this important process. The committee will submit ideas and review MDE proposals.

**Q: Why is Minnesota applying for this waiver?**

A: Minnesota is applying for the ESEA Flexibility waiver because the current NCLB system is broken and does not do an effective job of identifying schools in need of improvement or providing them with the kind of support they need to actually improve. This waiver will give Minnesota the opportunity to create a better, state-developed system that produces the best results for Minnesota students.