

A Work In Progress



Last month, the staff at the Kansas State Department of Education completed a significant project in finalizing the state's request for flexibility related to a number of provisions in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation and submitting it to the U.S. Department of Education. While there was a collective sigh of satisfaction at having sent off the [waiver request](#), we are well aware that this does not represent the end of our work, but in many ways just the beginning.

The waiver criteria from the U.S. Department of Education asked states to put their money where their mouth was - essentially saying: "If you don't like the current requirements, tell us what you think would work better."

In Kansas, that's exactly what we did. Instead of an accountability system that relies on a single measure of student performance to gauge student progress and school effectiveness, we have put forward an accountability plan based on multiple measures. The Kansas plan would look at three measures - student achievement on state reading and math assessments, growth in student progress on state reading and math assessments over time, and a closing of the gap between the highest and lowest performing students on state reading and math assessments - to determine how well our schools and districts are serving students.

We'll use those same measures to determine which of our schools deserve recognition for high performance, and which require technical assistance for low performance. If our waiver is approved, there will be no more lists of schools not making AYP, or schools in need of improvement based on having missed just one predetermined target in up to 66 categories. The accountability we are proposing is a more measured, more thoughtful and more accurate reflection of school performance.

We're also working through a model for how Kansas school districts will evaluate teachers and school leaders. The criteria from the U.S. Department of Education requires that the model include a tie to student performance. In Kansas, we're working with a variety of stakeholders to determine how best to achieve that connection.

As our request is reviewed, we fully expect to be called upon to answer questions and defend our application, but I am confident that we will be able to achieve a waiver from some of the most onerous provisions of the current NCLB legislation. Even when that happens, it will not mark the end of our work. We must begin now to create a plan for implementing our new accountability system, and once our waiver is approved, we'll put that plan into action.

Neither the work we have completed thus far, nor the work that lies in front of us is easy. On the contrary, it is some of the most difficult work that we'll do. But it's also the most important, and most rewarding work we'll do and I look forward to the challenge.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Diane".

Dr. Diane DeBacker
Kansas Commissioner of Education