

HIGHLIGHTS OF PENNSYLVANIA'S ESEA FLEXIBILITY REQUEST

COLLEGE- AND CAREER-READY EXPECTATIONS FOR ALL STUDENTS

Pennsylvania adopted rigorous English language arts and math standards now in place in 45 other States and the District of Columbia. Pennsylvania has also included pre-kindergarten standards, and together these standards serve as the framework for development of new, more rigorous assessments. Classroom implementation of the college- and career-ready standards is supported by a variety of activities including professional development delivered through the State network of Intermediate Units (IUs) and an established online system of resources focused on the standards. Pennsylvania is also focusing on supporting teachers of students with disabilities and English Learners through the Pennsylvania Training and Assistance Network (PaTTAN), which works with IUs to deliver training focused on the inclusion of students with disabilities in the transition to the new standards, and by hiring an additional English as a Second Language content advisor to provide expanded professional development related to the standards. The State is also engaged in a multi-pronged program of outreach to schools with high numbers of English Learner that includes technical assistance and revised instructional materials.

IMPROVED STATE AND DISTRICT ACCOUNTABILITY FOR ALL STUDENTS

Ambitious Performance Targets: Pennsylvania established new performance targets for reading and math that will cut the gap to proficiency in half within six years. The State has already introduced more rigorous high school assessments, and new assessments at grades 3 through 8 will be fully operational in 2014-2015.

Renewed Focus on Closing Achievement Gaps: Pennsylvania will identify the schools in the State with the greatest challenges for groups of students as “Focus schools” and demand interventions to improve student performance. In order to include more students in the accountability system, the n-size has been reduced from 40 to 11 and a combined subgroup has been created. To identify focus schools, Pennsylvania examined those with the greatest achievement gaps and graduation rates, and identified those schools with the largest gaps or graduation rates below 60 percent. Focus schools must review existing school improvement plans and implement meaningful interventions that are directly related to the basis for their identification. A variety of technical assistance and guided practice activities will be provided by the PaTTAN-IU network during school year 2013-2014, such as analysis of building, grade and individual needs; data analysis and instructional matching for all students; and differentiated interdisciplinary learning and collaborative educator teaming.

Aggressive Plan for Turning Around the Lowest-Performing Schools: Pennsylvania has identified the lowest-performing schools as “Priority schools” and will ensure that districts implement meaningful interventions in these schools. Priority schools will implement interventions aligned with rigorous turnaround principles, and will be provided with an array of sustained supports. Tools available include a curriculum audit process, online diagnostic assessments, an early warning system to improve graduation rates and a kindergarten entry inventory. For schools that fail to exit Priority status within three years, the district will be required to implement significant changes aligned to SIG options.

Building Capacity for School Improvement: All Title I schools that are not identified as a Priority or Focus school and that fail to meet subgroup targets for achievement or graduation rate for two consecutive years must utilize the State’s comprehensive planning tool to develop an improvement plan targeting the missed target. In addition to performance targets in achievement and graduation rate, Pennsylvania employs the School Performance Profile (SPP) to link annual school-level data with research-based resources in an extensive online library. All schools can use this information to analyze strengths and needs related to school improvement.

Increased Accountability and Support for Districts: All districts with Focus and Priority schools will receive on-site monitoring to assess the quality of interventions being implemented in those schools. Pennsylvania will provide technical assistance to these districts with a goal of building local capacity that will sustain future reform efforts. Districts are also held accountable for increasing graduation rates and closing the achievement gap through annual public reporting and documented assurances of district support in school improvement plans.

Transparently Reporting on Students’ Progress: Pennsylvania will continue to report all current achievement data by subgroups on State, district, and school report cards, as well as graduation rates or attendance, test participation rates, and whether individual subgroups meet their performance targets. In addition, the SPP provides a summary of data from additional indicators such as the number of students with Advanced Placement scores of 3 or higher, students meeting ACT/SAT college-ready benchmarks, and students successfully completing industry certification exams.

Creating a Well-Rounded Education: To encourage schools to focus on a well-rounded curriculum, Pennsylvania will hold schools accountable for student performance in writing and science, in addition to reading and mathematics.

SUPPORTING EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTION AND LEADERSHIP

Pennsylvania’s statute and guidelines governing local teacher and principal evaluation and support systems include multiple measures to determine educator effectiveness and to target professional development. The guidelines require annual evaluations that include observational evidence and student achievement data. Evaluators can access online modules that illustrate effective observational and rating practices and also include an assessment to measure their skills. In the 2013-2014 school year, Pennsylvania will continue to pilot the educator evaluation and support system, gathering data and feedback to refine the final system.