



State of New Jersey

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TO: Chief School Administrators
Charter School Lead Persons

FROM: Lucille E. Davy
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SUBJECT: *No Child Left Behind* Accountability Workbook Amendments

New Jersey's *Accountability Workbook*, which must be approved by the United States Department of Education (USDE), governs the process used by the state to assess and count students to calculate adequate yearly progress (AYP) for schools and districts. The New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) continually examines its processes, exploring methods that will improve validity and reliability of the accountability system.

On February 15, 2008, I sent a letter to the USDE requesting five amendments to the *Accountability Workbook* that we believe would improve the validity of our AYP results. On June 27, 2008, the USDE verbally granted us approval of all five amendments. Following is an explanation of these five amendments:

1. **A uniform proficiency "n" of 30 for total students and all student subgroups.** This amendment eliminates disparities in the minimum "n" size for different subgroups in New Jersey. While this represents a slight increase in the minimum "n" size for most subgroups (20 to 30), it represents a decrease for students with disabilities (35 to 30). We believe this amendment reflects a proper balance of validity and inclusion considerations. A single "n" size is necessary to meet the uniform "n" standards required by the USDE.
2. **Resetting of Starting Points and Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs).** The NJDOE administers state assessments in grades 3 through 8 and 11 in language arts literacy and mathematics. For AYP, the results of the state assessments are aggregated by grade span in each school (elementary: 3, 4 & 5; middle: 6, 7 & 8; and high school: 11). For the assessments that were administered this spring, four of our seven state assessments (grades 5, 6, 7 and 8) have been redesigned for both content areas (language arts literacy and mathematics). The focus of these new assessments is to add additional rigor and alignment with our state's content standards.

As a result of these new assessments, an adjustment of the AYP starting points and AMOs is being considered in both content areas, still retaining the 100% proficiency requirements no later than the 2013-14 school year. Due to the timeframe of administration, scoring and standard setting, the specific starting points and AMOs must be recalculated and submitted to the USDE for final approval at a later date. It is expected that this submission to the USDE will occur in September 2008. Upon USDE approval, districts and schools will then be notified of the results of the 2008 assessments for AYP purposes. This is expected to occur by the end of October 2008.

Since the process of the resetting the AMOs has delayed the notification to school districts of their AYP status (for elementary and middle schools) using the 2008 test results, the 2007 status and sanctions will continue for these schools for the 2008-09 school year as a transition. Districts and schools are required to implement the improvement sanctions using their 2007 improvement status. For Title I schools in need of improvement, the sanctions of school choice and supplemental educational services must continue as required in 2007. Parental notification requirements remain. Sample notification letters will be available on the NJDOE web site.

Please note that districts and schools will be notified in early August of the AYP results for high schools. There is no transition for these schools. Thus, the federal requirements continue for these schools.

3. **The use of an Index Model:** The NJDOE continues to explore methods that will improve validity and reliability of the state's accountability system. We are currently investigating an "index model" for use in New Jersey in future years. Given the new assessments and the possibility of resetting the starting points and AMOs, the NJDOE will be exploring this possibility. If the NJDOE decides to pursue an index model, the details will be included in the final 2008 submission of the Accountability Workbook to the USDE for review and approval
4. **AYP Restart:** As New Jersey continues implementation of the NCLB school improvement sanctions, increasing numbers of schools are being restructured. For some districts this has meant closing schools, reconfiguring grade levels, shifting staff and/or redistricting resulting in schools that are significantly different than they were prior to being identified as in need of improvement.

To address these schools that have significantly restructured, New Jersey has established an AYP restart criteria as follows: 1) the restructured school must now serve grade levels that are at least 50% different than the grade levels the school previously served *and* 2) the school's staff must now include 50% or less of the previous staff.

These criteria would not hold restructured schools accountable for performance of students in grades that are no longer in the building. Additionally, an AYP restart allows the restructured school to focus on teaching and learning rather than implementing school improvement sanctions that would no longer apply. You will be receiving, under separate notice, more information about AYP restart and the process to apply for a restart for eligible schools.

5. **Participation Averaging:** If a school is making AYP for all its subgroups and generally has a high participation rate, but in one year a particular subgroup's participation rate drops slightly below 95 percent, that school or LEA may be able to make AYP if its multiyear participation rate average for three years is at least 95 percent. This calculation will occur as part of the state's process for determining AYP.

The NJDOE will continue to investigate ways to make our accountability system as valid and reliable as possible. We will submit amendments to the *Accountability Workbook* as appropriate and continue to negotiate with the USDE on behalf of New Jersey's districts and schools.

Thank you for your continued commitment to quality education in our state as we strive to increase the academic achievement of our students. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact the Office of Student Achievement and Accountability at 609-943-4283 or by email at titleone@doe.state.nj.us

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