

August 1, 2006

To: Chief School Administrators
Charter School Lead Persons

From: Lucille E. Davy
Acting Commissioner

Subject: *No Child Left Behind* Accountability Workbook Amendments

You will soon be receiving a letter announcing the availability of 2006 preliminary adequate yearly progress (AYP) results for the schools in your district. AYP, required under the *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) Single Accountability System, was calculated by the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) using primarily state assessment results for grades 3-8 and 11. Other NCLB conditions, such as participation and size of student total and subgroup populations, were also applied to the AYP calculation.

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 and calculate AYP. The NJDOE continually examines its processes, exploring methods that will improve validity and reliability of the accountability system.

On March 31, 2006, I sent a letter to the USDE requesting three amendments to the *Accountability Workbook* that we believe would improve the validity of our AYP results. On July 27, 2006, the USDE verbally granted us only one of our requests and denied the other two. I want to explain the changes to you.

In previous years, the NJDOE applied a 5 percent misclassification rate to the AYP performance targets to protect against misidentification of schools and districts. To better differentiate for group size and accommodate the greater variability of results that can occur with small groups of students, we requested use of a confidence interval of 95 percent in lieu of the 5 percent misclassification rate. As part of this first amendment, we also requested a 75 percent confidence interval for safe harbor calculations. This amendment was accepted by the USDE.

We also requested a uniform minimum “n” size of 30 for all subgroups because it would reflect a balance of validity and inclusion considerations. New Jersey currently uses an “n” of 20 for all subgroups with the exception of students with disabilities, which has an “n” of 35. This request was denied.

The third requested amendment, related to the two percent flexibility for students with disabilities, was offered to states in a policy letter released by USDE Secretary Margaret Spellings on December 14, 2005. Since this increased flexibility is dependent upon the state having a uniform “n” size, New Jersey is not able to pursue this flexibility option for 2006.

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 negotiate with the USDE on behalf of New Jersey’s districts and schools.

The one approved USDE amendment will be used in the 2006 AYP calculations. Your 2006 preliminary AYP results are being calculated using the newly granted confidence intervals. These confidence intervals will be applied to the existing “n” sizes of 20 and 35 for proficiency and safe harbor calculations.

Thank you for your continued commitment to quality education in our state as we strive to increase the academic achievement of our students.

LED/BG T:\Single Accountability System\2006-2007\2006 AYP\Commissioner letter

- c: Members, State Board of Education
- Isaac R. Bryant
- Penelope Lattimer
- Senior staff
- Kathryn Forsyth
- Erika Leak
- Suzanne Ochse
- Brian Robinson
- Diane Schonyers
- County Superintendents
- Lee Group
- Garden State Coalition of Schools