UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

April 6, 2021

The Honorable Kathy Hoffman
Superintendent of Public Instruction
Arizona Department of Education
1535 West Jefferson Street
Phoenix, AZ 85007-3209

Dear Superintendent Hoffman:

I am writing in response to Arizona's request on March 31, 2021, that the U.S. Department of Education (Department) waive the accountability, school identification, and related reporting requirements for the 2020-2021 school year, pursuant to the authority in section 8401 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). Specifically, Arizona requested a waiver of:

- Accountability and school identification requirements in sections 1111(c)(4) and 1111(d)(2)(C)-(D): the requirements that a State measure progress toward long-term goals and measurements of interim progress; meaningfully differentiate, on an annual basis, all public schools, including by adjusting the Academic Achievement indicator based on a participation rate below 95 percent; and identify schools for comprehensive, targeted, and additional targeted support and improvement based on data from the 2020-2021 school year.

- Report card provisions related to accountability in section 1111(h) based on data from the 2020-2021 school year. These include:
    - Section 1111(h)(1)(C)(i)(I)-(IV) and (VI) (Accountability system description, other than the list of comprehensive, targeted, and additional targeted support and improvement schools).
    - Section 1111(h)(1)(C)(iii)(I) (Other Academic indicator results for schools that are not high schools).
    - Section 1111(h)(1)(C)(v) (School Quality or Student Success indicator results).
    - Section 1111(h)(1)(C)(vi) (Progress toward meeting long-terms goals and measurements of interim progress).
    - Section 1111(h)(2)(C) with respect, at the local educational agency (LEA) and school levels, to all waived requirements in section 1111(h)(1)(C).

After reviewing Arizona's request, I am pleased to approve a waiver of the requirements listed above. The intent of these accountability waivers is to focus on assessments to provide information to parents, educators, and the public about student performance and to help target resources and supports. This is particularly crucial this year, due to the COVID pandemic. As a result, we also encourage you and your school districts to consider other steps within your purview to further reduce the stakes of assessments this year, such as excluding their use from students' final grades, grade promotion decisions, educator evaluations, and local school ratings.

As part of this waiver, Arizona assured that:

- The State will make publicly available chronic absenteeism data, either as defined in the State's School Quality or Student Success indicator, if applicable, or ED*Facts*, disaggregated to the extent such data are available by the subgroups in ESEA section 1111(c)(2), on State and local report cards (or in another publicly available location).

- The State will make publicly available data on student and/or teacher access to technology devices and high-speed internet, disaggregated by the subgroups in ESEA section 1111(c)(2), to the extent such data are collected at the State or LEA level.

- Any school that is identified for comprehensive, targeted, or additional targeted support and improvement in the 2019-2020 school year (i.e., any school that was in that status as of the 2019-2020 school year), except for comprehensive support and improvement schools identified based on low graduation rates that meet the State's exit criteria, will maintain that identification status in the 2021-2022 school year, implement its support and improvement plan, and receive appropriate supports and interventions.

- The State will identify comprehensive, targeted, and additional targeted support and improvement schools using data from the 2021-2022 school year in the fall of 2022 to ensure school identification resumes as quickly as possible.

Finally, it remains vitally important that parents, educators, and the public have access to data on student learning and success. The Department encourages States, when posting State assessment results for the 2020-2021 school year, to prominently and in clear language provide information about the context of the data, including its limitations as a result of the pandemic. For example, in a situation where participation rates are low and/or uneven across student groups as a result of the pandemic, the results should include clearly worded context that such data are incomplete and, where applicable, are not representative of the make-up of the State, district, or school population. As always, assessment data should also be viewed alongside other important measures of student outcomes and opportunity to learn data to provide a more complete perspective on resources, support, and student success.

I continue to thank you for the work you are doing to help support the social, emotional, and academic needs of your State's students in this difficult time. If you have any questions about this waiver, please contact my staff at OESE.Titlei-a@ed.gov.

Sincerely,

Ian Rosenblum
Delegated the Authority to Perform the
Functions and Duties of the Assistant Secretary
Office of Elementary and Secondary Education

cc: Kelly Koenig, Arizona Department of Education