

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

July 27, 2011

The Honorable Arne Duncan
Secretary of Education
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary Duncan,

We write in strong support of the request for a waiver of provisions of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) that the State of Tennessee submitted for your approval this week, consistent with the requirements of Section 9401 of the ESEA authorizing States to seek waivers of the law or regulations.

Tennessee is providing clear leadership in education reform and proposes an accountability structure that will result in significantly greater student achievement gains than the current Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements. The waiver request calls for significant growth in student achievement along state and locally defined goals, ensures dramatic improvements in the bottom five percent of schools within a new Achievement School District, and articulates a three-tiered intervention plan for districts that fail to improve aggregate student achievement or close achievement gaps. Furthermore Tennessee will continue to disaggregate data and maintain maximum transparency to parents and taxpayers.

Governor Bill Haslam and Kevin Huffman, Tennessee's Commissioner of the Department of Education, have worked with other governors and chief state school officers to support bold and innovative education reforms, such as college- and career-ready academic standards, robust assessment systems, growth models for accountability, and support for systems gauging teacher and principal effectiveness. Most recently, the Council of Chief State School Officers and 41 states have rallied around a set of principles to guide new models of school and district accountability. Unfortunately, many of these state-led innovations are undermined by the well-intentioned but now outmoded No Child Left Behind law. In Tennessee, despite significant progress, the constantly rising AYP standards required by the federal law are now firmly in the way of meaningful reform efforts.

We request that you review Tennessee's waiver request in an expedited manner, especially as the 2011-2012 school year rapidly approaches and decisions about the future of Tennessee schools cannot wait. We share your concern about the need and opportunity for Washington to support

state-led innovation, rather than present a barrier or seek to codify a single "right" answer for education reform, and hope that you will consider Tennessee's waiver request in that light.

Sincerely,

Laura Alexander

Bowen

David P. Roop TN-1

Marsha Blackburn

Ch. F. TN-03

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Diane Black

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