



We're Aiming Higher

Last fall, we learned the U.S. Department of Education (USED) will be granting waivers from many of the onerous mandates imposed by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. The waivers offer states the opportunity to be freed from the 2014 deadline that all students must be “proficient” in reading and math and avoid labeling thousands of their schools as failing based on the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) mandate.

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If the USED approves Wisconsin’s waiver, the AYP model will be replaced by a new state accountability system that will rate schools on a combination of student test scores (proficiency), growth in student learning, and progress in narrowing achievement gaps. It will also increase the rigor of state assessments by using the more challenging National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) standard of proficiency to monitor our students’ progress.

Another positive aspect of our NCLB waiver is that it proposes a state educator effectiveness evaluation model based on growth in student learning and measures of effective educator practice. The model represents

state-of-the-art thinking about measuring educator effectiveness yet allows local districts to continue to use rigorous teacher evaluation systems they have developed on their own or with their CESAs through an “equivalency” process.

All in all, these changes will deliver a clear message to our state’s parents, students and community members – we’re aiming higher and more accurately in terms of student learning. The changes outlined in the waiver are intended to provide our educators and school leaders with more and better data to help guide decision-making and the everyday education of our students.

As I write this, several unanswered questions remain. We don’t know how soon the federal government will respond to our waiver request. However, the changes, if approved by the waiver, could help us raise academic standards and give educators the tools and data to closely track and improve their students’ learning. Of the 11 states that have submitted waiver requests thus far, 10 have been approved.

Nevertheless, there is still the question of school accountability. Months ago, Gov. Scott Walker, Superintendent Tony Evers and Republican Education Committee chairs in the state Senate and Assembly convened a task force that voted to agree that publicly funded schools, including private schools

with voucher students, must be held accountable. In early February, however, when state legislation to implement those recommendations was released by the legislative leadership, the bill draft excluded accountability at the school level. The proposed legislation calls into serious question whether private schools that accept publicly funded vouchers and independent charter schools will be held to the same standard as traditional public schools.

This lack of accountability must be addressed to ensure a level playing field as vouchers, open enrollment and other competitive-based initiatives are expanded. But, regardless, we move forward.

On a different note, I’d like to thank everyone who attended the 91st State Education Convention. We’ve heard many positive comments from our members as well as helpful suggestions for improvement. As always, we are thankful for your feedback and will use it to make the 2013 Convention even better.

We hope the dialogue and idea-sharing from this year’s State Education Convention have re-energized and inspired you to be the best school leader you can be for our students. We look forward to seeing you at our upcoming events, and as always, we welcome your comments, questions and feedback. ■

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