UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY

JUL 2 7 2006

The Honorable Randy J. Dunn
Superintendent of Education
Illinois Board of Education
100 North First Street
Springfield, Illinois 62777

Dear Superintendent Dunn:

I am writing in response to Illinois' request to amend its State accountability plan under Title I of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965* (ESEA), as amended by the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB). Following our discussions with your staff, the changes that are aligned with NCLB are now included in an amended State accountability plan that Illinois submitted to the Department on July 24, 2006. I am pleased to fully approve Illinois' plan, which will be posted on the Department's website. A summary of the approved amendments is enclosed with this letter.

As you know, any further requests to amend the Illinois accountability plan must be submitted to the Department for review and approval as required by section 1111(f)(2) of Title I. Please note that approval of Illinois' accountability plan does not constitute approval of the State's standards and assessment system.

Please also be aware that approval of Illinois' accountability plan for Title I, including the amendments approved above, does not indicate that the plan complies with Federal civil rights requirements, including Title VI of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964*, Title IX of the *Education Amendments of 1972*, Section 504 of the *Rehabilitation Act of 1973*, Title II of the *Americans with Disabilities Act*, and requirements under the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*.

NCLB has provided a vehicle for States to raise the achievement of all students and to close the achievement gap. We are seeing the results of our combined endeavor; achievement is rising throughout the nation. I appreciate Illinois' efforts to raise the achievement of all students and hold all schools accountable. If you need any additional assistance to implement the standards, assessments, and accountability provisions of NCLB, please do not hesitate to contact Patrick Rooney (Patrick.Rooney@ed.gov) or Grace Ross (Grace.Ross@ed.gov) of my staff.

Sincerely,

Henry L. Johnson

Enclosure

cc: Governor Rod Blagojevich
Gail Leiberman

Amendments to the Illinois accountability plan

The following is a summary of the State's approved amendments. Please refer to the Department's website (www.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplans03/index.html) for the complete Illinois accountability plan.

Academic assessments and adequate yearly progress (AYP) determinations (Elements 1.1, 1.2, and 6.1)

Revision: Illinois will assess students in grades 3–8 and discontinue the Terra Nova assessment in grade 2. For schools that only include grades K–2, AYP status will be backmapped from the grade-3 assessment at the receiving school. For those lower-grade schools that merge into more than one feeder school, the feeder school with the majority of the students will be used as the basis for the lower-grade school's AYP status.

Definition of full academic year (Element 2.2)

Revision: Illinois clarified that for 2005–06 and thereafter, students who are enrolled in the district on or before May of the previous school year and who stay continuously enrolled through State testing in the spring are considered to be enrolled for a full academic year. For example, for 2005–06, students who are enrolled in the district on May 1, 2005 and who stay continuously enrolled through State testing in spring 2006 are considered to be enrolled for a full academic year.

Change in confidence interval (Element 3.2)

Revision: Illinois clarified that the current 95 percent confidence interval in AYP calculations of the percentage proficient will be applied to the "all students" group as well as all disaggregated groups. In addition, Illinois will calculate a 75 percent confidence interval on safe harbor calculations.

Inclusion of all students in AYP determinations (Element 5.2)

Revision: To be consistent with Department policy (refer to: www.ed.gov/news/pressreleases/2004/03/03292004.html), Illinois clarified the acceptable medical exemptions:

- Medically exempt students may be excluded from the enrollment count in a school and from taking a State assessment if, at the time of testing, they a) have been admitted on an emergency basis to a hospital or residential facility (e.g., because of a motor vehicle or other type of accident, emergency surgery, psychiatric emergency) or on an emergency basis to a drug/alcohol/psychological treatment program; and b) are unable to be schooled.
- Homebound students at the time of testing who are too ill (based upon a specific written statement from a physician licensed to practice medicine in all its branches) to be tested may be excluded from the enrollment count in a school and from taking a state assessment.

Including students with disabilities in AYP determinations (Element 5.3)

Revision: Illinois will use the "proxy method" (option 1 in our guidance dated December 2005) to take advantage of the interim flexibility regarding calculating AYP for the students with disabilities subgroup (refer to: www.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/secletter/051214a.html). Illinois

will calculate a proxy to determine the percentage of students with disabilities that is equivalent to 2.0 percent of all students assessed. For this year only, this proxy will then be added to the percent of students with disabilities who are proficient. For any school or district that did not make AYP solely due to its students with disabilities subgroup, Illinois will use this adjusted percent proficient to re-examine if the school or district made AYP for the 2005-06 school year.

Participation rate (Element 10.1)

Revision: Illinois clarified that students with tests that have been invalidated will be considered as not tested for the purpose of calculating the participation rate.