

Summary of State ESEA Flexibility Request

STATE: Minnesota

Purpose: The purpose of this document is to provide a summary of key aspects of state waiver requests made under the U.S. Department of Education's ESEA Flexibility initiative. This summary recognizes that states continue to work to refine and enhance these systems which will continue to evolve and improve over time.

Introduction. This section summarizes some overarching issues important to the state's overall NCLB waiver request.

1. What is the state's **clear vision and comprehensive integrated plan** to raise the bar on college and career-readiness? [See Overview; 2A-Summary of Accountability System; full request]

Minnesota provides a clear and comprehensive plan for advancing college and career-readiness. The state has done extensive work to develop strong college and career-ready standards and assessments, proposes a more rigorous accountability system with a strong focus on gap closure, and has taken initial steps to develop new, more robust educator evaluation systems. The state has very strong implementation plans for each element of its request, with a focus on building school and district capacity. Working to close achievement gaps, which are identified as a major challenge facing the state, is also an explicit focus.

2. How does the state **define college and career-readiness**? [See Overview; full request]

Minnesota does not explicitly provide a definition of college, career, and citizen-readiness other than through the metrics it defines in its accountability system. Minnesota's request also references a state law that requires state standards to be sufficiently rigorous to prepare students for success in college and the skilled workplace. The state also cites a specific goal of ensuring students are prepared for "advanced work and civic participation." (p. 54).

3. How does the state's request articulate a commitment to **innovation, evaluation, and continuous improvement**? [See Overview; 2A-Summary of Accountability System; full request]

Minnesota specifically commits to a process of continuous improvement across numerous areas of its request. The state notes its intent to add additional longitudinal

course-taking and postsecondary data to school accountability reports as soon as that data is available. Additionally, the state has a specific five-year process for review and refinement of academic standards. Further, the state commits to updated educator evaluation models over time to reflect new knowledge within the state and across the country.

4. How does the state's request provide evidence to indicate the state has the **capacity to implement** its proposed policies within the given timelines? [See Overview; 2A-Summary of Accountability System; full request]

Minnesota has already undertaken extensive work to develop and implement college and career-ready standards and assessments and has developed extensive partnerships with institutions of higher education, regional cooperatives, external experts, and philanthropic organizations to support the implementation of its proposed accountability and educator evaluation systems. The state has identified an aggressive but feasible timeline for implementation and demonstrates significant capacity based on its work to date in implementing college and career-ready standards and assessments.

Principle 1: Standards and Assessments

1. Describe the state's plan for transitioning to and implementing **college and career-ready standards and assessments**. [See Section 1B]]

Minnesota has passed legislation requiring alignment of their standards with college and career-readiness. Reading standards were recently revised and aligned with Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and will be implemented in 2012-2013. New math standards were implemented in 2010-2011 and have been certified by state institutions of higher education to meet expectations for postsecondary readiness without need for remediation. Minnesota's math standards are also closely aligned with CCSS.

The state is participating in the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) consortium and is conducting an alignment study to assess the extent to which WIDA English language proficiency standards align with Minnesota math and science standards. The results of this study will help inform state plans to make standards accessible to English language learners (ELLs) on the same schedule as other students. The state has also applied Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles to guide the development of standards to ensure that they are accessible to students with disabilities.

Minnesota's implementation of revised standards is based on a three-stage process of informing, implementing, and aligning to best practices. Initial efforts have focused on raising awareness and have included outreach to key stakeholder groups, development of informational websites for educators and parents, and initial regional information sessions through the state's Education Service Cooperative Units (ECRUs). The next stage of implementation focuses on development of tools and resources, and professional development on how to use the standards. The final stage of implementation is centered on aligning to best practice and supporting full, effective implementation. This includes partnership with professional organizations, alignment with other state and district initiatives, and ongoing regional and online professional development.

The state is providing specific training on standards implementation to support ELL and special education teachers. To ensure that special educators are best able to meet student needs, the state is raising special education teacher preparation standards and has established a response-to-intervention community of practice to allow educators to share resources and work collaboratively to improve practice. Additionally, the state has developed professional development of standards-based IEPs to ensure that goals align to grade-level content standards. The state also provides training to ELL teachers on scaffolding content across different levels of language proficiency while maintaining high engagement.

While Minnesota districts have authority to choose instructional materials, the state is working to provide guidance on best practices and alignment of instructional materials. The state has developed a comprehensive birth-12 literacy plan implementation guide with a structure for aligning curriculum, instruction, and assessments across the spectrum. Also, the state has developed online math and science frameworks that provide curriculum planning and instructional materials aligned with new state standards. These tools also include detailed explanations of standards, instruction models, sample assessment items, and support for differentiation.

The state is working to both assess and expand its accelerated learning opportunities. It plans to develop a data system of dual credit programs to identify gaps and areas of need and provide more opportunities for low-income and minority students to participate in these and other accelerated programs. The state is also partnering with institutions of higher education to provide professional development for high school teachers and college faculty to expand access to these programs.

Minnesota also funds the Educational Planning and Assessment System (EPAS) for school districts and charters that choose to participate. This series of linked assessments

allows teachers and parents to determine college-readiness beginning in middle school. The state's P-20 Education Partnership has also created a task force that will develop a plan to encourage that middle and high school students take more rigorous courses to ensure that they are college and career-ready.

Principle 2: Differentiated Accountability and Supports

1. Describe the **measures and metrics** the state proposes to use to make accountability determinations (including AMOs) to drive college and career-readiness. [See 2A and B]

Minnesota proposes to continue using its existing NCLB Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) measures (participation, proficiency index, and attendance/graduation rate) to calculate AMOs but with a new target of decreasing the percent of students who are not proficient in each subgroup by half within six years to better address achievement gaps. Districts will only be evaluated on AMOs while schools will have an additional component calculated called Multiple Measurements Rating (MMR). The MMR combines two years of data on proficiency, individual student growth, growth gap reduction, and graduation rates.

Proficiency in the MMR is calculated using the state's approved index model that provides schools with points based on the percentage of measured subgroups that make AYP, with subgroups weighted by relative size. Individual student growth is calculated using a normative model of the difference between expected and observed growth. Growth gap reduction is measured based on the average of individual student growth in subgroups compared to individual student growth in higher-performing subgroups (i.e. free and reduced-lunch students are compared with non free and reduced-lunch students). Finally, the state calculates four-year graduation rates.

The MMR rating will be used to identify Reward, Focus, and Priority Schools. Reward schools will be the top 15% of Title I schools. Since the MMR includes both proficiency and growth, the state will not differentiate between high-progress and high-performing schools. Every three years, the state will identify the lowest 5% of Title I schools based on their MMR rating. Those with the lowest MMR as well as SIG schools will be included. Focus schools will also be identified every three years, but using a modified MMR rating. To determine Focus schools, the state will measure proficiency only of subgroups and not include all students. Then this measure will be combined with the growth gap reduction measure to calculate a Focus rating. This rating will be used to identify the bottom 10% of schools that have not already been identified as Priority schools. Additionally, the state will include Title I high schools with graduation rates of less than 60% (based on three-year averages of a six-year adjusted cohort rate).

State report cards will show AMOs and MMR ratings for schools and AMOs for districts. Additionally, the state is collecting new data in its longitudinal data system and plans to report rigorous course-taking and postsecondary enrollment in the future. The data will be housed in a new user-friendly website launching in December 2011 that will allow users to compare data across schools.

2. To what extent is **student growth** included in the accountability system? How is it used to advance college and career-readiness? [See 2A and B]

Minnesota's accountability system includes individual student growth both overall and among subgroups as a key factor in its MMR rating that determines school categorization. The state's growth model uses the difference between expected and observed growth of individual students as its growth calculation. The MMR also includes a measure of growth gap reduction, which is taken by comparing the average individual student growth in subgroups and comparing it to statewide averages in comparison to (higher-performing) subgroups. The state notes that growth data provides an important way to maximize the state's investment in assessment.

3. How is the state including and advancing **subgroup accountability and closing achievement gaps**? [See 2A, B, and E]

Minnesota has a significant focus on subgroups in both AMOs and in the state's MMR system. Due to the large achievement gap the state faces, the accountability system was designed to have a particular focus on narrowing gaps. AMOs for each subgroup have a target of reducing the rate of non-proficient students in half within six years and subgroups that have further to go have more aggressive targets. Additionally, subgroups are included in the proficiency index of MMR and are the specific focus of the growth gap reduction measure.

4. Describe the state's general system of **supports and interventions** for all schools and those designated as Priority, Focus or Reward schools. How does the state incorporate deeper analysis of school performance such as through diagnostic review? [See 2A, D, E, F, G]

Minnesota plans to categorize a broader range of schools than required and provide a differentiated system of supports and interventions based on need. The state hopes to audit and subsequently highlight the best practices of Reward schools. This will facilitate replication of strong practices and will also help Reward schools identify key features that have driven their success. The state intends to develop an online

clearinghouse of information on Reward school best practice that would be accessible to all schools. The state is also seeking funding to partner Reward schools with lower-performing schools as an additional support.

If schools are identified as Focus schools, the school must perform a diagnostic review to determine the best interventions to meet the needs of students in underperforming subgroups. The Statewide System of Support (SSOS) will provide support through sharing of best practices and provisions of technical assistance to aid in determining appropriate targeted interventions. The school will have to submit an improvement plan based on these interventions for state approval. The state will encourage schools to incorporate culturally relevant and specific practices into intervention plans where appropriate. Schools with low graduation rates will be required to use a state-developed early warning system to identify and intervene to assist students at risk for dropping out.

In addition to the required categories of schools, Minnesota intends to identify Celebration schools and Continuous Improvement Schools. To be designated as a Celebration school, a school from the 60-85th percentile on MMR must apply to the state identifying reasons for recognition. This process will allow schools to examine best practices and identify areas for improvement. Additionally, the state will identify all Title I schools in the bottom 25% that are not already Priority or Focus schools. These schools must also complete a needs assessment and school improvement plan and will be eligible for technical assistance from the state. The state will audit 10% of the improvement plans of Continuous Improvement schools to monitor fidelity of implementation.

5. Describe how the state will address priority schools utilizing the USED **turnaround principles**. [See 2D]

Minnesota has a comprehensive menu of supports and interventions for Priority schools. These include data analysis, goal-setting, professional learning communities, curriculum alignment, time audits, and professional development needs analysis. This array of supports will be designed and implemented with an SSOS facilitator.

Minnesota plans to develop diagnostic value-added profiles for Priority schools to help them identify root causes of poor performance, assess their needs, and monitor student achievement. These schools will be required to set aside 20% of their Title I school improvement funds to identify and implement interventions that have a record of success. These interventions will be developed as part of a comprehensive school improvement plan that also includes professional learning communities with intensive

job-embedded professional development. Priority schools will also implement extensive data monitoring systems and be required to submit regular formative data reports to both the district and state.

Priority schools will also conduct time audits to measure the amount of instructional time in place for core academic subjects and explore possibilities to increase instructional time. The state will also support priority schools through a curriculum audit to ensure that instruction is aligned with state standards and will recommend professional development on standards-alignment as needed. Further, Priority schools will be required to audit PK programming (if offered) and may choose to use school improvement funds to support PK if not offered.

As part of the school review process, factors impacting school safety and discipline will also be evaluated to determine if they are contributing to lost instructional time. Schools with poor engagement will receive resources and strategies from the SSOS to enhance their outreach and engagement.

6. How will the state build **capacity of schools and districts** to improve student achievement? [See 2G]

The state has numerous systems in place to build school and district capacity through regional and content-based networks that together form a Statewide System of Support (SSOS). For example, the state has a network of math and science teacher centers that have developed curricular frameworks and other tools to assist in standards implementation. Additionally, the state uses its regional ECSUs to provide training and support to districts in their area. The state has a specific focus on implementation throughout its request with detailed planning describing how it will implement these proposals to improve student achievement.

Principle 3: Teacher and Principal Evaluation and Support

1. Describe the state's plan for development of **guidelines** or, if the state is further along in development, the state's **plan and system for educator evaluation** and the extent to which it advances student achievement. [See 3 A and B]

Minnesota has just recently begun development of a new educator evaluation system, but is building on the work of existing initiatives and stakeholder workgroups to help facilitate design and implementation. In 2011, the state passed legislation requiring the state education agency to develop a new system of education evaluation. In response,

the Commissioner of Education convened a Teacher Evaluation Work Group and a Principal Evaluation Work Group.

The Teacher Evaluation Work Group is charged with developing a system with frequent evaluation, focused on teaching and learning, differentiated by experience and expertise, and linked to professional development and employment decisions. The state will develop a default model that districts can implement as well as broad guidelines that LEAs which develop local systems must meet. The Principal Evaluation Work Group is charged with developing an evaluation model that will improve teaching and leading by shaping the school's professional environment and improving teacher performance and effectiveness.

This work builds off existing initiatives including the Minnesota Q-Comp program that provides job-embedded professional development, the Teacher Support Partnership to provide strong induction for new teachers, and the Teacher Performance Assessment which is being piloted by teacher preparation institutions to measure teaching candidates' ability to advance student achievement.

The teacher evaluation system will have some common elements across all teachers, but will be differentiated according to teachers' level of expertise. All teachers will be evaluated based on state teaching standards and all evaluations will be conducted by qualified and trained evaluators. Additionally, all evaluations will include longitudinal student outcome data. For probationary teachers, the state proposes requiring three formal observations with peers serving as mentors. For tenured teachers, the state recommends a three-year professional review cycle with peer evaluation in the years that summative evaluation does not occur.

The state has not yet developed all elements of the principal evaluation and is considering whether to also develop a multi-tiered evaluation for school leaders. Principal evaluation will include annual evaluation of the principal's instructional leadership, organizational management, and professional development. The evaluation will include observations and surveys.

Principle 4: Administrative/Reporting Burden

1. Beyond an assurance, each state is required to examine and **reduce as appropriate administrative/reporting burdens** on LEAs. While it is not clearly included in USED's waiver application, does the state's request address this issue? [See full request]

In addition to the required assurance, Minnesota explicitly states its intent to reduce administrative burdens on LEAs to allow them to focus on continuous improvement of schools, but does not provide additional detail.