UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY

OCT 22 2010

The Honorable June Atkinson
North Carolina Department of Public Instruction
301 North Wilmington Street
Raleigh, North Carolina 27601

Dear Superintendent Atkinson:

I am pleased to approve North Carolina's standards and assessments under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) as amended. This letter applies to changes made in the assessment system after North Carolina's initial approval as documented in the June 2006 letter from Henry Johnson. My decision is based on input from peer reviewers external to the U.S. Department of Education (Department) and Department staff who reviewed and carefully considered the evidence submitted by North Carolina.

North Carolina's standards and assessments in reading/language arts, mathematics and science meet all applicable statutory and regulatory requirements of the ESEA. Accordingly, North Carolina's standards and assessment system warrants Full Approval. Specifically, North Carolina's system includes academic content standards in reading/language arts, mathematics and science as well as end-of-course standards in English I, Algebra I and Biology; student academic achievement standards in reading/language arts, mathematics, science, English I, Algebra I and Biology; alternate academic achievement standards in reading/language arts, mathematics and science for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities; modified academic achievement standards for eligible students with disabilities in reading/language arts and mathematics; general assessments in reading/language arts and mathematics in grades 3 through 8, end-of-course assessments in English I and Algebra I, a writing test (grade 10) and science assessments in grades 5 and 8 and the end-of-course Biology assessment; alternate assessments based on alternate academic achievement standards (the NCEXTEND1) in the corresponding grades in reading/language arts, mathematics and science; and alternate assessments based on modified academic achievement standards (the NCEXTEND2) in reading/language arts and mathematics in grades 3 through 8.

Please be aware that approval of North Carolina's standards and assessment system under the ESEA is not a determination that the system 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*. Finally, please remember that, if North Carolina makes significant changes to its standards and assessment system, the State must submit information about those changes to the Department for review and approval.

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ACCOUNTABILITY SERVICES

We have found it a pleasure working with your staff during this review process. Please accept my congratulations for North Carolina's approved standards and assessment system in reading/language arts, mathematics and science under the ESEA. I wish you well in your continued efforts to improve student achievement in North Carolina. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Sue Rigney (sue.rigney@ed.gov) of my staff.

Sincerely,

Thelma Meléndez de Santa Ana, Ph.D.

cc: Governor Bev Perdue
Lou Fabrizio
Tammy Howard

EVIDENCE REQUIRED FOR PEER REVIEWS OF ASSESSMENT SYSTEMS UNDER TITLE I OF THE ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION ACT

NORTH CAROLINA
June 2010

United States Department of Education

NCLB Assessment System Review

SECTION 4: TECHNICAL QUALITY

Critical Element	Description of State policy and practice (Record document and page # for future reference)	Comments/Questions Regarding State Materials
• Data regarding the assessment system's intended and unintended consequences, or a plan and timeline for such data collection. (4.1g)	NC submitted the following documents: "A Study to Examine the Consequential Impact of North Carolina Assessments. Draft 5/5/2010" "Consequential Validity: An Examination of How Tests and Test Scores are Used in North Carolina May 2010"	These reports summarize work done by NC in studying intended and unintended consequences of the testing program and it is clear NC takes this issue seriously. Two different approaches were taken. The first to be implemented was a qualitative study with small samples using school level staff focus groups. The second study was a fairly large scale survey of teachers and administrators using with Likert type items. The two methods complement one another. Unfortunately, a number of positive and negative consequences of testing identified in the focus groups were not incorporated into the large scale survey which is a real missed opportunity. In general, the survey content was narrower and shallower than the focus group identified issues. On the positive side, NC now has better information on this topic and can address those issues in future surveys and work with the assessment system.
Reading and Science: • Description of a system for monitoring the effectiveness of the accommodations (4.6)	NC submitted "North Carolina Audit and Monitor Process for NCEXTEND1 Preliminary Report." undated.	The submission is not responsive to the request for a description of the system for monitoring the ***effectiveness*** of the accommodations. What was submitted is a draft report based on a small part of the data to be collected. The Peer Reviewers suggest something like a survey of test administrators and/or teachers on the effectiveness of

		accommodations might be one way to get at this information more directly.
NCEXTEND1 • Evidence that results of the NCEXTEND1 audits that are scheduled to take place during the 2009-10 school year and evidence that the results are used to evaluate the administration and scoring procedures (4.5) • Evidence of how the state assures that the rater scoring processes allow for independent judgments and/or rater reliability at the item/task level (4.2)	NC submitted "North Carolina Audit and Monitor Process for NCEXTEND1 Preliminary Report." undated.	It is evident that NC is on the right track with this preliminary report. The evidence submitted will be adequate for meeting the requirements for these elements when NC submits the final report "North Carolina Audit and Monitor Process for NCEXTEND1."
SECTION 4: TECHNICAL QUALITY **Summary statement**		
NC must submit the final report "North Carolina Audit and Monitor Process for NCEXTEND1" and a final report concerning the effectiveness of accommodations.		

SECTION 5: ALIGNMENT

Critical Element	Description of State policy and practice (Record document and page # for future reference)	Comments/Questions Regarding State Materials
NCDPI must provide a detailed plan and timeline for addressing the various alignment issues in the NCDPI assessment program. It needs to be a comprehensive plan and needs to address quality control in implementation of the test development processes.	NC submitted "Alignment Plan for the New Generation of Assessments" dated 4/5/2010.	The alignment plan is quite comprehensive and it is evident that NC is making positive changes and working very hard to meet the requirements. NC has undertaken some deep reflection to do the "root cause analysis" to identify the basis for observed wide ranging alignment problems with the NC testing program. It is clear that NC is making changes in the writing of standards, test specifications, teacher rater training, and quality control standards and mechanisms for test building that should assure that the next generation of NC tests are well aligned. NC's new alignment plan is exemplary. The submission meets the evidence requirements for this element.

SECTION 5: ALIGNMENT Summary statement
No additional evidence is required for this section.

SECTION 7: ASSESSMENT REPORTS

Critical Element	Description of State policy and practice (Record document and page # for future reference)	Comments/Questions Regarding State Materials
NCEXTEND1 NC DPI must provide a final copy of the NCEXTEND1 Interpretive Guide (7.1)	NC submitted "Interpretive Guide to the WinScan Score Reports for NCETEND1 Assessments" dated 4/21/2010.	The submission meets the requirements for this element.
SECTION 7: ASSESSMENT REPORTS Summary statement		
No additional evidence is required for this section.		