



Christie Administration's Bold Education Reforms Affirmed in Federal Waiver

NJ Dept. of Education Announces Renewal of ESEA Flexibility

For Immediate Release

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Trenton, NJ –The U.S. Department of Education on Thursday granted New Jersey's request for renewal of its flexibility waiver under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), allowing the state to continue with innovative education programs that best fit the needs of New Jersey's schools.

The flexibility waiver request was approved for three years without conditions, an affirmation of the Christie Administration's success in implementing education and accountability reforms aimed at closing the persistent achievement gap and securing quality educational opportunities for every child regardless of zip code.

"With this renewal, New Jersey will be able to continue implementing its plans to promote innovative, locally tailored strategies to improve educational outcomes for all students, close achievement gaps, increase equity, and improve the quality of instruction," said Ann Whalen, acting Assistant Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education, in a letter to New Jersey Education Commissioner David C. Hespe.

"New Jersey can take pride knowing that our efforts are leading to real improvements in student learning," said Commissioner Hespe. "The flexibility allows New Jersey to continue to address the unique needs of our schools and students, and it helps us continue to focus on our goal that every child ultimately graduates prepared for success in college and career."

The Commissioner noted that, "Without this waiver, all of New Jersey schools would be declared 'failing' under the No Child Left Behind Act and would be compelled to implement federally required punitive corrective actions, such as loss of flexibility regarding spending."

The Christie Administration's implementation of educator effectiveness evaluations that focus on accountability and hands-on support for low-performing instructors and its collaboration with higher education to promote college- and career-readiness are among the initiatives recognized and facilitated by the federal waiver.

The U.S. Department of Education established the waiver process to provide states flexibility from the prescriptive provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which required 100 percent of a school's students to meet academic proficiency levels by 2014 or face possible interventions. New Jersey was one of 42 states that received flexibility waivers.

"We are particularly pleased that the USDOE has approved our differentiated support system for Priority and Focus schools based on school needs and levels of NJDOE support," said Commissioner Hespe. "This also allows the Department to continue our support for schools in the state-operated districts."

The New Jersey Department of Education provides additional supports for those schools identified as Priority Schools (the lowest-performing 5 percent), Focus Schools (schools needing improvement in specific areas such as graduation rates or achievement gaps), or other Title I schools. The Department also designates "Reward Schools" as those that have outstanding student achievement or growth.

The waiver also focuses on effective instruction and leadership. New Jersey's efforts to improve instruction and leadership are reflected in its AchieveNJ system of evaluations for teachers and principals. Educators who are identified as struggling are given the support and resources needed to improve.

In addition, the ESEA flexibility has allowed New Jersey to implement other innovative support structures, such as creating partnerships with higher education for teacher training and student preparedness, and Family and Community Engagement Expansion Grants designed to foster family-school partnerships. These structures are designed to not only support the general K-12 student population, but also to target the unique needs of English language learners, students with disabilities, and students living in poverty.

The U.S. Department of Education's renewal letters are available on the [ESEA flexibility page](#).