



Missouri's No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Flexibility Waiver Approval Frequently Asked Questions

General Questions

1. Has the state of Missouri received an ESEA Flexibility Waiver?

Yes, the U.S. Department of Education approved Missouri's ESEA waiver on June 29, 2012, which gives Missouri a single, state-led accountability system for identifying high-performing and struggling schools.

2. Why did Missouri apply for a waiver?

The state's ultimate goal is ensuring that all students graduate college- and career-ready through the professional practice of effective teachers and leaders.

Missouri was one of 36 other states and the District of Columbia that have applied for flexibility regarding some specific requirements of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. Waiver approval allows Missouri to focus on its state-created system of school improvement, the Missouri School Improvement Program (MSIP). The state now has more autonomy in guiding improvement efforts in its schools by establishing ambitious, yet attainable, goals for schools.

3. When will the waiver go into effect?

The waiver will go into effect immediately for the 2012-2013 school year. There will be some implementation steps and assurances that will phase in during the upcoming school year and subsequent years thereafter.

4. What flexibility does the waiver give Missouri?

The waiver allows Missouri to use one aligned system of accountability for school districts. Since 2002, Missouri schools and districts have been held accountable to both the state's Missouri School Improvement Program (MSIP) and the requirements of NCLB. Implementing these dual systems simultaneously has generated confusion for schools and the public, especially when reports from each system produce conflicting results. Without the waiver, the percentage of Missouri schools failing to meet a crucial goal under NCLB was expected to increase from the already troubling 2011 results of 87.6 percent.

By implementing an aligned accountability system through the flexibility of the ESEA waiver, Missouri can identify local education agencies (LEAs) in need of improvement and better utilize resources directed at improvement. The state can then provide appropriate support and interventions to help schools meet expectations.

5. How long will the waiver be in effect?

Missouri's waiver will take effect for the 2012-2013 school year and remain in place for three years. At that point, the state may request an extension of the waiver. Once Congress passes the next reauthorization of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) the reauthorized law would take priority over Missouri's waiver.

6. What does the waiver mean for students, teachers, parents and families?

Under this flexibility, students, teachers, parents and families will get a more accurate report on the success of their child's school. With NCLB, a school either did or did not meet adequate yearly progress (AYP), resulting in an accountability system that did not differentiate among the lowest performing schools and schools that needed help in only one or a few areas.

Through MSIP, a school's annual performance report (APR) provides a more complete and comprehensive picture of where a school or district is meeting performance expectations and where it is not. Using 2011 – 2012 school year assessment and graduation rate data, a percentage of schools will be identified as reward, priority, or focus schools. These new school designations will provide a deeper understanding of what resources schools need in order to be successful in their efforts to prepare students to be college- and career-ready. This flexibility allows Missouri to implement an aligned accountability and support system that requires real change in the lowest performing schools, promotes locally-designed solutions based on individual school needs, and recognizes schools for success. When schools are identified, families will know that school and district leaders will adopt targeted and focused strategies for the students most at risk or in need of support and intervention.

7. Who reviewed Missouri's waiver application?

Missouri's initial application was submitted February 24, 2012. A panel of six peer reviewers at the U.S. Department of Education examined the application and requested further clarification on areas as needed.

8. Why wasn't Missouri approved with the first group of round two states?

As part of the waiver application process, the U.S. Department of Education wants to ensure that all students would be supported under one state system of accountability. The Missouri School Improvement Program (MSIP) has a 20-year history of setting high standards for our students. Missouri's program was unfamiliar to the U.S. Department of Education; therefore, Missouri needed to provide further explanation and clarification of its system. It's important to note that MSIP 5 and the Educator Evaluation System pilot have been in the works for several years – long before applying for the waiver.

9. How will the waiver affect the standards/expectations of a child's academic achievements?

Nothing in the waiver changes the state's approach to rigorous academic standards. Statewide standards will remain in place. The state has changed the way it will measure each school's ability to help students meet those standards. The primary goal is to ensure all students exit Missouri's K-12 systems college- and career- ready.

10. What are the main points addressed in the waiver?

States that apply for a flexibility waiver must address three main principles:

- Principle 1: College and career-ready expectations for all students.
- Principle 2: State-developed differentiated recognition, accountability and support.
- Principle 3: Supporting effective instruction and leadership.

Here is an overview of Missouri's ESEA waiver principles:

- Principle 1
 - Implements college- and career-ready standards for reading/language arts and mathematics in schools statewide.
 - Develops and administers annual, statewide, aligned, high-quality assessments that measure student growth.
- Principle 2
 - Creates one aligned system of accountability, reducing duplication and making more effective and efficient use of resources throughout the state.

- Provides more accurate identification of buildings in need of school supports. As a result, more efforts can be spent on supports and determining which buildings truly need intervention.
- Principle 3
 - Provides greater flexibility at a local level to allow better focus on improving student learning and increasing the quality of instruction in Missouri schools.
 - Improves the effective educational practices and the professional development of teachers, principals and superintendents. Missouri will hold educators accountable for continuous improvement.

11. Now that the waiver has been awarded, what are the next steps?

Missouri will begin by implementing strategies for improved student achievement for ALL students. The fifth cycle of the Missouri School Improvement Program, or MSIP 5, will guide schools, helping them identify areas for focused improvement. Title 1 schools will be identified as a reward, priority or focus school. A list of those schools will be released in the fall when 2012 data is available.

- Reward school - Missouri will recognize reward schools throughout the state as models of excellence. Recognition will be based on measures of high achievement for all students and those schools that are making significant progress in closing the achievement gap.
- Priority school - Priority schools are among the lowest-performing schools in the state when considering the school's overall student population. If a school is not demonstrating the expected outcomes for students, the Department will intervene with rapid and targeted interventions. The intervention system includes tools and strategies to build capacity at the local level for district-focused school improvement.
- Focus school - Focus schools are Title 1 schools whose Student Gap Groups are among the lowest-performing in the state according to state assessment results. Interventions and support will assist identified schools in improving the performance of all students, with a particular focus on improving the performance of groups of students that have the greatest achievement gap.

Principle 1 – College- and Career- Readiness

12. How do the Missouri Core Academic Standards (including the Common Core State Standards for math and English language arts) fit into the waiver?

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) stand as the foundation of high-quality public education in English language arts and mathematics in Missouri. Department staff has also initiated a process to revise academic standards in other subject areas (e.g., science, arts, career and technical education).

It is crucial that Missouri's educators are provided with the support needed to fully implement the CCSS and ensure that all students are provided with high-quality instruction. The flexibility afforded through the waiver will create the conditions necessary for Missouri's teachers and educational leaders to fully implement the CCSS. Missouri has developed model curriculum to assist educators in implementing the CCSS, and professional development opportunities will continue to ensure full realization of the standards.

13. How does the waiver affect English language learners (ELLs)?

Missouri's accountability system requires that all students meet more rigorous standards and demonstrate college- and career-readiness. ELL populations are growing in Missouri, and the state is adding a position of English language learner consultant to the curriculum and assessment section of the Office of College and Career Readiness during the 2012-13 school year.

ELL teachers—and core academic teachers—will participate in focused work to ensure that ELL students not only develop the academic language required to be successful in academic core curriculum, but also develop skills that will allow them to successfully participate in a post-secondary program.

14. How does the waiver affect students with disabilities?

The waiver combined with the CCSS presents an opportunity to ensure that students with disabilities are able to fully access college- and career-ready standards. The Department's Office of Special Education identified two primary areas of focus after reviewing the performance of students with disabilities compared to the general population: Early Childhood Outcomes (ECOs) and Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) proficiency in English language arts and mathematics in grades K-5. Missouri's focus on these two areas for improvement will help ensure students with disabilities access to the CCSS.

Principle 2 - Accountability

15. Will MSIP 5 go into effect immediately upon approval of the waiver rather than in 2013?

MSIP 5, approved in December 2011, will not be used for district accreditation purposes until the state gathers three years of data. School districts and the public will see each district's MSIP 5 status beginning in the fall of 2012. Districts have three years to improve their status before accreditation classification is determined in 2015.

16. Will the waiver release school districts from the NCLB proficiency targets?

Missouri's waiver will continue to require schools to raise the bar for performance of all students and will hold schools accountable for the academic growth of all students.

In 2011 under NCLB, 83 percent of Missouri's school districts did not meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), and 53 percent were in correction action. This over-identification of districts in need of improvement does not allow the state to distinguish among those schools and districts in most need of assistance and intervention. The requirements under NCLB resulted in an administrative and fiscal burden. The over-identification masked the intended purpose of driving improved student achievement and school performance; closing achievement gaps; and increasing the quality of instruction for students.

The opportunity to implement an aligned accountability system for MSIP 5 through the flexibility of the ESEA waiver will allow Missouri to identify schools and districts in highest need with a unified accountability system. In addition, Missouri will be able to more fully coordinate support systems with a focus on improved student achievement and closing the achievement gap through strategies contained in the Missouri's Top 10 by 20 plan.

Principal 3 - Educator Evaluation System

17. What is the Educator Evaluation System?

Missouri's new Educator Evaluation System focuses on the improvement of effective educational practices and the professional development of teachers, principals and school superintendents. The initial work on the system's standards and indicators was completed by numerous stakeholders including educators, partner organizations, school districts and educator preparation programs. During the 2011-2012 school year, 174 school districts tested various components and provided feedback to finalize the first version of the educator evaluation system.

The system will be piloted during the 2012-2013 school year. The purpose of the pilot is to test all aspects of the system and learn how districts determine growth within their own district. The pilot will also be beneficial for educators in the state to learn about and better understand the meaning

of growth. Once the pilot is complete, the system will be further refined and made available for use by districts starting with the 2013-2014 school year.

18. Is the state requiring all districts to adopt the Educator Evaluation System?

No. Districts may either use the state’s model Educator Evaluation System or create their own system. The state only requires that the district system align with the seven principles of effective evaluations. Contemporary research suggests seven essential principles when creating an effective evaluation system. These principles are the foundation of Missouri’s Educator Evaluation System.

1. Clear expectations
2. Differentiated performance levels
3. Probationary period (for new educators)
4. Student performance measures
5. Regular meaningful feedback
6. Evaluator training
7. Use of evaluation results

19. What are some ways districts can determine student growth?

- A test of students’ knowledge at two points in time (example: a test of the number of push-ups a student can do at the beginning of the year and a test the end of the year)
- Building/grade level assessments
- Classroom assessments
- State assessments

Waiver Background

- Missouri is one of 26 states and the District of Columbia that have requested waivers from key provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act in the *second round* of the waiver application process.
- In February, all 11 states submitting waiver applications in the *first round* of the process received approval. Initially, 10 states were approved. Federal education officials worked with the 11th state (New Mexico) on further refining its application, which was approved less than a week later.
- The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which was first enacted in 1965, is the principal federal law affecting K-12 education. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), the most recent reauthorization of the ESEA, was set to expire in 2007, but current law is automatically extended until a new bill is passed.