July 23, 2014

The Honorable Arne Duncan
Secretary
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Secretary Duncan:

I am writing to request a one-year extension of Massachusetts’ ESEA flexibility, so that Massachusetts can continue to implement ESEA flexibility through the end of the 2014–2015 school year.

ESEA flexibility has provided Massachusetts the opportunity to implement a unitary system for accountability and assistance that maintains our state’s high standards and expectations and meets both federal and state requirements. Our ESEA flexibility plan aligns with statewide reform efforts that we began several years ago, including adoption of new statewide curriculum frameworks that incorporate the college- and career-ready Common Core State Standards, transitioning to a next-generation statewide assessment system, implementation of a new statewide educator evaluation system, and the use of aggressive strategies for turning around our lowest performing schools and districts. As one indication that our efforts, forty percent of our initial cohort of Level 4/Priority schools met their three-year turnaround goals and in September 2013 exited Level 4/Priority school status. We have much more work to do on behalf of the Commonwealth’s students, and ESEA flexibility provides us the opportunity to further our statewide reform efforts within a coherent framework.

Extension of Massachusetts’ ESEA flexibility through the end of the 2014–2015 school is also in the public interest. In preparing for our state’s extension request we engaged educators and other education stakeholders to solicit their input on our progress in implementing ESEA flexibility. As described in our amended ESEA flexibility request, educators and other stakeholders expressed broad support for fundamental aspects of our plan as well as a desire for more time for implementation of certain aspects of the work.
As part of the extension process, Massachusetts proposes several minor changes to its currently approved ESEA flexibility request. Attached please find the following documents:

(1) a completed amendment request template, reflecting the necessary consultation of stakeholders and describing the amendments Massachusetts is making to its approved request, including those required to address ESEA flexibility Part B monitoring “next steps”;

(2) a redlined version of Massachusetts’ currently approved ESEA flexibility request reflecting all proposed changes.

I understand that these documents will be reviewed to ensure that they comply with the principles and timelines of ESEA flexibility.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Mitchell D. Chester, Ed.D.
Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education

Attachments
(1) Completed amendment request template
(2) Red-lined version of ESEA flexibility request