



Richard Woods, Georgia's School Superintendent
"Educating Georgia's Future"

The Honorable Betsy DeVos, U.S. Secretary of Education
U.S. Department of Education

September 26, 2017

Dear Secretary DeVos:

Georgia's ESSA plan development process brought together all of Georgia, including students, parents, educators, education advocacy groups, business and industry representatives, and other stakeholders, to craft a plan that best meets the needs of our children, communities, and state. Thousands of Georgians have committed thousands of hours to the betterment of our state's education system.

As an outspoken advocate for both flexibility and innovation, **I am formally requesting Georgia's participation in the Innovation Demonstration Authority.** I look forward to the application process, as Georgia is in a strong position to develop and scale up innovative assessment options throughout our state.

In Georgia, several school districts are leading the nation in the areas of assessment innovation and flexibility. Henry County Schools has made great strides in personalized and competency-based education. Gwinnett County Schools and Fulton County Schools, two of our state's largest districts, have expressed their deep desire to have additional assessment options, and have utilized local funds to explore innovative solutions. Putnam County Schools is working with neighboring districts to develop and design formative assessments that better align to the instructional needs of educators and students. My Department has engaged, and will continue to engage, these and other districts across the state in this work. I am excited about the innovation occurring in our districts and I ensured that language in Georgia's ESSA plan articulated our state's strong commitment to flexibility in this area.

Georgia's Senate Bill 211 and related appropriations – which passed in our state's most recent legislative session, and which I strongly supported -- reaffirmed the state legislature's and Governor's commitment to assessment flexibility and innovation. The legislation directed Georgia's ESSA Assessment working committee to pursue maximum flexibility and provided funds to support comparability studies between our state assessment, Georgia Milestones, and nationally normed assessments, such as the SAT and ACT. Georgia has established a process allowing districts to petition the state to administer a nationally recognized high school academic assessment to all students in lieu of the state high school assessment. Our Governor's Education Reform Commission provided recommendations supporting competency-based and interim assessments.

Utilizing existing Departmental funds, I will establish an Assessment Innovation Fund to provide competitive grants to districts to assist in the creation of innovative assessment resources, tools, and systems. During Georgia's upcoming legislative session, I will urge the legislature to appropriate additional resources for this Assessment Innovation Fund. Since participation in the federal Innovation Demonstration Authority yields only additional flexibility and not additional federal funding, I believe establishing this fund at the state level is essential to provide the necessary resources and support for our districts and ensure the success of this work.

Members of Georgia's State Board of Education have also been proponents of flexibility around assessment. I will work with the State Board to reaffirm that support via a State Board of Education resolution.

Per our submitted State ESSA Plan, I have formed an Assessment Innovation and Flexibility Task Force composed of state policymakers, districts, business and industry representatives, parents, and educators. I will also seek feedback and insight from my parent, student, teacher, and superintendent advisory councils. The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) has agreed to assist with third-party facilitation of these meetings, and will provide technical expertise as well as collaborative opportunities with other states.

As you can see, Georgia is in a strong position to provide innovative assessment options. Georgia's participation in the Innovative Demonstration Authority will affirm your agency's support for the development and provision of these options, which will allow our educators to better serve the nearly 1.8 million students in our state.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard Woods". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Richard Woods
State School Superintendent, Georgia