UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

OCT 3 0 2015

The Honorable Matthew Blomstedt
Commissioner of Education
Nebraska State Department of Education
301 Centennial Mall South
Lincoln, NE 68509

Dear Commissioner Blomstedt:

Thank you for submitting Nebraska's request for ESEA flexibility. I appreciate the hard work required to transition to college- and career-ready standards and assessments; develop systems of differentiated recognition, accountability, and support; and evaluate and support teacher and leader effectiveness. The U.S. Department of Education (ED) appreciates Nebraska's commitment to increasing the quality of instruction and improving academic achievement for your students.

Nebraska's ESEA flexibility request was reviewed by a panel of peer reviewers. During the review, the expert peers considered each component of Nebraska's request and provided comments in the form of Peer Panel Notes to inform the Secretary's decision of whether to approve Nebraska's request. The Peer Panel Notes also provides details regarding the strengths of Nebraska's request and areas that would benefit from further development. ED staff also reviewed Nebraska's request, informed by the Peer Panel Notes, to determine consistency with the ESEA flexibility principles.

The peers noted, and we agree, that Nebraska's request demonstrates the significant steps your State has taken towards developing supports and systems that will help you move towards meeting the requirements of ESEA flexibility. For example, your accountability system is built upon the following tenets: College and Career Readiness; Assessment; Positive Partnerships, Relationships, and Student Success; Educator Effectiveness; Transitions; and Educational Opportunities and Access. Additionally, you have proposed a four-level accountability system that incorporates student performance in several ways and includes other factors such as graduation rate. However, based on the peer reviewers' comments and our review of the materials Nebraska has provided to date, we have identified certain components of Nebraska's request with regard to the requirements of ESEA Flexibility (Principles 1, 2 and 3) that need further clarification and may need additional development or revision.

At the same time, it is our responsibility to ensure that, as we permit States to depart from the requirements of current law, they do so in a manner that continues to increase the quality of instruction and improve achievement for all students, but especially those most at risk of

academic failure, including low-achieving students, English learners, economically disadvantaged students, and students with disabilities.

We remain committed to working with Nebraska to meet the principles of ESEA flexibility and improve outcomes for all students. We stand ready to work with Nebraska as quickly as possible upon your State's receipt and review of the peer panel feedback. ED will be in touch to set up a call to further discuss the timeline and process for providing revisions or additional materials to ED. If you have any additional questions or want to request technical assistance, please do not hesitate to contact Tracey Albert or Millie Bentley-Memon of my staff at: OSS.Nebraska@ed.gov.

Sincerely,

Ann Whalen
Delegated the authority to perform the functions and duties of Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education

cc: Matt Heusman, Research and Evaluation/Trainer
Aprille Phillips, Student Achievement Coordinator