



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
Department of Education

March 15, 2013

TO: Division Superintendents

FROM: Patricia I. Wright, Superintendent of Public Instruction

SUBJECT: U.S. Department of Education Approval of Virginia's Alternate Revised Methodology for Annual Measurable Objectives for Accountability Years 2013-2014 through 2017-2018, Under Provisions of Virginia's Application for Waivers from Certain Requirements of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965* (ESEA)

The U.S. Department of Education (USED) has approved Virginia's alternate revised methodology for annual measurable objectives (AMOs) for accountability years 2013-2014 through 2017- 2018, as approved by the Virginia Board of Education (VBOE) at its October 25, 2012, meeting. An explanation of the final AMO methodology is available in an updated version of [Virginia's approved application for waivers from certain requirements of ESEA](#), also known as Virginia's ESEA flexibility application, and in [agenda item I](#) of the October 25, 2012, VBOE meeting.

Background on Virginia's ESEA Flexibility Application

On February 23, 2012, the VBOE approved Virginia's ESEA flexibility application, which was submitted to USED for review and approval. On April 17, 2012, USED requested additional information on specific areas of the application. The state responded with clarifying responses and engaged in ongoing discussion with USED to gain clarity on the federal accountability requirements under the ESEA flexibility provisions.

Regarding Virginia's original AMO methodology as proposed in the February 2012, ESEA flexibility application submission, USED requested that the state establish AMO targets that increase over time and close proficiency gaps. Virginia agreed to establish AMO targets for all students, proficiency gap groups, and other subgroups that increase over time and reduce the proficiency gap using a modification of the AMO methodology described in Section 1111 of ESEA.

On May 24, 2012, the VBOE approved a revised version of the state's ESEA flexibility application that included a modification of the AMO methodology. Virginia's revised ESEA flexibility application was submitted to USED and approved on June 29, 2012. At that time, Virginia proceeded with establishing and releasing AMO targets for mathematics and reading.

USED Request for Virginia to Revise AMO Methodology

In an [August 29, 2012, letter to Superintendent Wright](#), USED praised Virginia for implementing new and more rigorous college- and career-ready mathematics assessments and acknowledged that it had approved Virginia's revised AMO methodology, but at the time, data from the new mathematics assessments were not available.

Once the methodology was applied to the data, USED determined the resulting AMOs were not sufficiently ambitious to close the achievement gap and did not meet the ESEA flexibility requirement that subgroups that

are farther behind demonstrate greater academic gains over time. As a result, the Superintendent of Public Instruction proposed to the VBOE, at its September 27, 2012, meeting an alternate revised methodology for establishing AMOs for mathematics for accountability years 2013-2014 through 2017-2018 that would meet ESEA flexibility requirements.

On October 25, 2012, the VBOE approved the alternate revised AMO methodology for mathematics, which will also be used to establish reading targets for accountability years 2013-2014 through 2017-2018 based on new and more rigorous reading assessments to be administered for the first time in 2012-2013. The alternate revised AMO methodology was subsequently submitted to USED for final approval.

Final Approved AMO Methodology

On March 5, 2013, Virginia received final USED approval (Attachment A) of the alternate revised AMO methodology adopted by the VBOE at its October 25, 2012, meeting. Listed below are key features of the methodology:

Year 1 AMO Targets:

- The mathematics and reading AMO targets for Year 1 (for accountability year 2012-2013 based on 2011-2012 assessment results) remain the same as calculated based on the methodology approved by USED on June 29, 2012.

Year 2-6 AMO Targets:

- The methodology to establish **mathematics** and reading AMO targets for Years 2-6 (accountability years 2013-2014 through 2017-2018 based on assessment results from the previous year) will use the performance of the “all students” subgroup as the point of comparison for all other subgroups.
- For mathematics, AMO targets for Years 2-6 have been calculated for every subgroup, such that by the 2017-2018 accountability year (based on assessments administered in 2016-2017) the minimum required pass rate would be 73 percent, the same as the Year 6 AMO for the “all students” subgroup.
- For **reading**, AMO targets for Years 2-6 will be calculated based on results from the revised reading assessments administered in 2012-2013, such that by the 2017-2018 accountability year (based on assessments administered in 2016-2017) the minimum required pass rate would be the same as the Year 6 AMO for the “all students” subgroup.

Safe Harbor Provisions:

- In addition to meeting the AMO target using the current pass rate, previously approved safe harbor provisions remain in effect that allow schools and subgroups to meet the AMO target by reducing the prior year’s failure rate by 10 percent or greater, or by using a 3-year average.
- As adopted by the VBOE on October 25, 2012, schools and subgroups are expected to meet each year’s AMO targets, or the prior year’s pass rate, whichever is higher, up to 90 percent. The AMO target may also be met if the pass rate exceeds the target and falls within five percent of the previous year's pass rate. This provision cannot be used for more than two consecutive years.

[Agenda item I](#) from the October 25, 2012, VBOE meeting provides additional details about the final AMO methodology. The Virginia Department of Education will provide additional information and technical assistance related to the final AMO methodology and targets through future communications such as Superintendent’s Memoranda, Superintendent’s E-mail, press release, and training sessions for school division personnel.

Questions about Virginia's ESEA flexibility application or the state's final approved AMO methodology may be submitted to ESEA@doe.virginia.gov.

PIW/VT/dd

Attachment:

- a. [March 5, 2013, USED Approval Letter](#) (PDF)