UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

May 30, 2013

The Honorable James A. Rose
Interim Director
Wyoming Department of Education
2300 Capitol Avenue
Hathaway Building, 2nd Floor
Cheyenne, Wyoming 82002

Dear Director Rose:

Thank you for submitting Wyoming's request for ESEA flexibility. The U.S. Department of Education (Department) appreciates 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 Department is encouraged that Wyoming and many other States are designing plans to increase the quality of instruction and improve student academic achievement.

Wyoming's request was reviewed by a panel of six peer reviewers during the week of May 6-10, 2013. During the review, the expert peers considered each component of Wyoming's request and provided comments in the form of Peer Panel Notes that the Secretary will use to inform any revisions to your request that may be needed to meet the principles of ESEA flexibility. The Peer Panel Notes, a copy of which is enclosed with this letter, also provide feedback on the strengths of Wyoming's request and areas that would benefit from further development. Department staff also have carefully reviewed Wyoming's request, taking into account the Peer Panel Notes, to determine consistency with the ESEA flexibility principles.

The peers noted, and the Department agrees, that Wyoming's request was particularly strong in its leveraging of recent legislation regarding teacher and principal evaluation systems to provide a foundation for implementing reforms under ESEA flexibility, use of science and writing assessments in its accountability system beginning in the 2014–2015 school year, and implementation of a robust website including resources related to ESEA flexibility for multiple audiences, including local educational agencies (LEA), schools and other stakeholders, particularly given the high number of rural LEAs in Wyoming.

At the same time, based on the peer reviewers' comments and our review of the materials Wyoming has provided to-date, the Department has identified certain components of your request that need further clarification and may need additional development or revision. In particular, significant concerns were identified with respect to the following:

- Lack of detail on specific interventions, methods of their selection, and methods for their successful implementation in priority, focus, and other Title I schools;
- Lack of detail on professional development for teachers and principals on the transition to college- and career-ready standards; and
- Lack of a high-quality plan for ensuring successful adoption and implementation of teacher and principal evaluation and support systems by LEAs.

The enclosed list provides details regarding these concerns, as well as other key issues raised in the review of Wyoming's request, that the Department believes must be addressed before the Secretary can approve your request for ESEA flexibility. The Department encourages Wyoming to consider all of the peers' comments and technical assistance suggestions in making revisions to its request, but to focus primarily on addressing the concerns identified in this letter.

Although the Peer Panel Notes for Wyoming provide information specific to your request, Wyoming also may benefit from comments and technical assistance suggestions made by other peer panels regarding issues common to multiple State educational agencies' requests. For this reason, Department staff will reach out to Wyoming to provide relevant technical assistance suggestions and other considerations that may be useful as you revise and refine your request.

The Department remains committed to working with Wyoming to meet the principles of ESEA flexibility and improve outcomes for all students. We stand ready to work with Wyoming as quickly as possible. In order to ensure prompt consideration of revisions or additional materials, please submit those materials by June 14, 2013. Department staff will be in touch to set up a call as early as this week to discuss the timeline and process for providing revisions or materials.

You and your team deserve great credit for your efforts thus far, and I am confident that our teams will be able to work together to address outstanding concerns. Thank you for your continued focus on enhancing education for all of Wyoming's students. If you have any additional questions or want to request technical assistance, please do not hesitate to contact Victoria Hammer at 202-260-1438.

Sincerely,

Deborah S. Delisle

Deborah Delisle
Assistant Secretary

Enclosure

cc: David Holbrook, Federal Programs Division Director

SUMMARY OF ADDITIONAL INFORMATION REGARDING WYOMING'S ESEA FLEXIBILITY REQUEST

CONSULTATION

- Please provide additional information on the steps that the Wyoming Department of Education (WDE) took to meaningfully engage teachers and their representatives and diverse stakeholders and communities and describe how WDE will continue to meaningfully engage teachers and their representatives and diverse stakeholders and communities as it continues to develop and implement ESEA flexibility. *Consultation Questions 1 and 2.*

PRINCIPLE 1: COLLEGE- AND CAREER-READY EXPECTATIONS FOR ALL STUDENTS

- Please provide additional information regarding the following activities related to the transition to college- and career-ready standards. *See 1.B.*
  - Providing meaningful professional development and other supports to prepare teachers to teach all students, particularly English learners, students with disabilities, and low-achieving students, to ensure that all students have access to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). *See 1.B., Part B.*
  - Conducting strategically-timed workshops and ongoing training for sustained CCSS implementation support in 2013–2014 and beyond, including for all teachers of special populations noted above. *See 1.B., Part A.*
  - Providing professional development and supports to prepare principals to provide strong, supportive instructional leadership based on the new standards. *See 1.B., Part A.*
  - Developing and disseminating a high-quality model for instructional materials aligned with CCSS. *See 1.B., Part A.*
  - Working with Wyoming's institutions of higher education to better prepare incoming teachers and principals for the transition to CCSS, including teachers of special populations noted above. *See 1.B., Part A.*

PRINCIPLE 2: STATE-DEVELOPED DIFFERENTIATED RECOGNITION, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND SUPPORT

- Please address concerns regarding Wyoming's proposed system of differentiated recognition, accountability, and support:
  - Provide additional information on WDE's plan and timeline for piloting and determining the weightings of school performance indicators and criteria for overall school performance levels in the State's new school accountability system under the Wyoming Accountability in Education Act for implementation in the 2014–2015 school year, particularly how it will ensure that graduation rate will contribute significantly to overall school performance score. *See 2.A.i., 2.A.i.a. and 2.A.ii, Option B.*
  - Describe WDE's strategy to communicate to teachers, parents, and other stakeholders about the new accountability systems given the size of the State and complex nature of some elements of the system (*e.g.*, matrices to determine overall school performance level). *See 2.A.i.a.*
  - Address concerns regarding the sub-indicators within the graduation rate index and their weightings, including removing certificates of completion and continued enrollment sub-indicators. *See 2.A.i. and 2.A.i.a.*
  - Indicate how the 95 percent participation requirement for assessments will be included in the accountability system to maintain strong accountability for assessing all students. *See 2.B.*

- Clarify the definition and use of the combined subgroup of non-proficient students, particularly within the context of the "equity" indicator and participation rate calculations. *See 2.A.i.b.*
- Provide additional information on how WDE will differentiate interventions and support for priority, focus, and other Title I schools to ensure that interventions are targeted based on the needs of the school and students. *See 2.E.iii. and 2.F.ii.*
- Provide additional information regarding the qualifications and membership of the Professional Judgment Panel. *See 2.A.i.a.*
- Address concerns that the self-assessment required in all schools not "exceeding expectations" might not represent an improvement in WDE's existing improvement process. *See 2.D.iii.*

- Please address concerns regarding priority and focus schools:
  - Demonstrate that WDE has identified the required number of focus schools using its proposed method that meet the definition of focus schools in ESEA flexibility. See the document titled: *Demonstrating that an SEA's list of Reward, Priority, and Focus Schools Meet ESEA Flexibility Definitions*, as applicable. *See 2.C.i, 2.D.i and 2.E.i.*
  - Describe the interventions in priority schools that are aligned with all of the turnaround principles and how these interventions will be delivered in a high-quality manner, including specific interventions for English Learners, students with disabilities, and low-achieving students for three years. *See 2.A.i.b., 2.D.iii.b. and 2.D.v.*
  - Describe the steps WDE will take to ensure meaningful consequences for priority and focus schools that do not make progress after full implementation of interventions. *See 2.D.iii.*
  - Strengthen the proposed exit criteria for priority and focus schools to ensure that they will result in significant progress in improving overall student achievement. *2.D.v. and 2.E.iv.*
  - Describe the interventions in focus schools and how these interventions will be delivered in a high-quality manner, including interventions for English Learners, students with disabilities, and low-achieving students. *See 2.E.iii.*
  - Describe the process WDE will use to ensure that all focus schools implement interventions beginning first semester of the 2013–2014 school year. *See 2.E.iii.*

- Please provide more information as to how WDE will differentiate among other Title I schools and provide incentives and supports to these schools based on WDE's new AMOs, graduation rates targets, and other measures to address the needs of all students, including English Learners, students with disabilities, and low-achieving students. *See 2.F.i and 2.F.ii.*

- Please address concerns regarding State educational agency (SEA), local education agency (LEA), and school capacity:
  - Describe how WDE will build capacity in and hold LEAs accountable for improving school and student performance. *See 2.G.*
  - Provide additional information on steps WDE is taking to ensure effective support for and monitoring of implementation of interventions (e.g., resources mobilized to ensure manageable caseloads for intervention coaches and liaisons, status of online implementation milestone tracking systems, etc.). *See 2.G.*
  - Describe the process in place for the rigorous review and approval of any external providers used by WDE and its LEAs to support the implementation of interventions in priority and focus schools.
  - Describe how WDE will provide funds under section 1003(a) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended, to priority and focus schools, instead of to schools in "improvement" status.

PRINCIPLE 3: SUPPORTING EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTION AND LEADERSHIP

- Please address concerns regarding the guidelines for teacher and principal evaluation and support systems:
  - Provide a high-quality plan for the adoption of teacher and principal evaluation guidelines by the end of the 2012–2013 school year, including key milestones or activities, a detailed timeline, party or parties responsible, evidence, resources and significant obstacles. *See 3.A.i., Option A.i.*
  - Describe how all teachers and principals in all LEAs will receive ratings based on teacher and principal evaluation systems that meet the requirements of ESEA flexibility during the 2015–2016 school year. *See 3.A.i, Option A.i.*
  - Describe how the teacher and principal evaluation guidelines will ensure the use of multiple valid measures in determining performance levels, including as a significant factor data on student growth for all students in tested and non-tested grades and subjects (including for English Learners and students with disabilities). *See 3.A.i, Option A.i.*
  - Describe how WDE will ensure the sufficient involvement of teachers and principals in the development of these guidelines, including teachers of English learners and students with disabilities. *See 3.A.i., Option A.ii.*

- Please address concerns regarding Wyoming's process for ensuring that each LEA develops, adopts, pilots, and implements evaluation and support systems consistent with the guidelines:
  - Describe WDE's process for reviewing and approving an LEA's teacher and principal evaluation and support systems to ensure that they are consistent with the SEA's guidelines and will result in the successful implementation of such systems, and ensuring that these systems include teachers of English learners and students with disabilities. *See 3.B.*
  - Describe WDE's process for ensuring that an LEA develops, adopts, pilots and implements its teacher and principal evaluation and support systems with the involvement of all teacher and principals, including teachers of English learners and students with disabilities. *See 3.B.*
  - Describe WDE's plan for providing adequate guidance and other technical assistance to LEAs, including the use of a model evaluation framework, in developing and implementing teacher and principal evaluation and support systems according to the required timelines. *See 3.A.i, Option A.i. and 3.B.*