



STATE OF ALABAMA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Thomas R. Bice
 State Superintendent
 of Education

October 19, 2012

MEMORANDUM

TO: City and County Superintendents

FROM: Thomas R. Bice *TB*
 State Superintendent of Education

RE: Clarifications

The following is a summation of our discussions in Florence and from the WebEx held this morning. Please share with those you deem appropriate.

1. In the midst of change there are some absolutes that should be our focus that should ground us all as we begin the transition to new standards and a balanced and meaningful assessment and accountability system. Those absolutes are on Slide 17 of the attached SSA PowerPoint entitled *Absolutes During the Transition*. It has been my experience that for the past decade we have allowed assessment and accountability to consume our focus and that we are programmed to go there first when decisions impacting public education are considered. The new reality is we are moving away from that model to one with a focus on teaching and learning, so please communicate this shift to your faculty and staff and do so regularly as it is so easy to revert to the NCLB/AYP mentality.
2. Assessments are listed by implementation year on Slide 13. Most are self-explanatory with the following exceptions. The "New" assessment for 3-7 beginning next year has NOT been determined. It will, however, be aligned to our academic content standards so its identity is not crucial in a standards-based teaching and learning environment. You, along with other stakeholder groups, will be involved in the selection process.

In terms of the QualityCore End-of-Course (EOC) tests, when I met with you in Florence last week, I was willing and sincere in agreeing to your request that students' results from the QualityCore End-of-Course Tests count for 20% of their course grade. Since that time, our legal counsel has brought to my attention a direct conflict with that decision based on a statement included in the letter to parents that I provided to you for distribution in July regarding phasing out the *Alabama High School Graduation Exam*. The statement read: "In future years, **but not for the 2012-2013 administration**, these new end-of-course tests will be used as a percentage of the student's grade." As your state superintendent, I must retract last week's decision. It is my responsibility to protect you and your local board from legal jeopardy. Therefore, the QualityCore End-of-Course tests will not count as part of the student's grade for this year.

We will administer the EOC tests as planned, at the end of the course, whether that is at the end of a trimester, end of semester, or end of the year depending on your local schedule. We need the data gathered during this transition year, when it has no impact on accountability, to inform instructional decisions and guide our commitment for these assessments to be tightly aligned to our standards. We do not plan to release these results or publish any school or school system ranking that might be used inappropriately. Our in-house legal counsel and external legal advisors are working with us to ensure that this data is simply a trial run during a transition year to help us collectively make decisions for the future.

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With the decision made not to count the scores on the EOC as part of the student grade, you can now give the tests at the end of the course or whenever it makes instructional sense for you since there will be no pressure to have results reported in time to include in a student's grade.

3. In terms of accountability, for this year we remain under the AMO freeze based on the 2010-2011 AMOs for reading and mathematics, and the assessments to be used for this limited report will be the ARMT+, AAA, and AHSGE for 11th grade as has been used in the past. There will NOT, however, be the typical AYP report released at the end of the school year as it has been done previously as we transition to a new system of accountability that is described on Slide 14 with associated data points listed on Slide 15. As you will see there are several areas yet to be defined and that is by design. You, along with many others, will be involved in refining the definitions connected with the broad areas of accountability listed on Slide 14 with a 2014-2015 deadline for full implementation of the ESEA waiver and 2015-2016 for implementation of the A-F grading system. We will be sharing partial accountability as we implement the various components over the next two years.

In closing, let me again bring your attention back to #1 above. We have the unprecedented opportunity to shift from a focus on assessment and accountability to one of teaching and learning, from a focus on a summative assessment system to one with a balanced focus on formative assessment, from a narrowly defined accountability system to one that is differentiated and multi-dimensional with a focus on portraying our public education system in a much broader way than has previously been done under NCLB and AYP.

As I shared with those present, this is a year of transition. What I would ask is that we realize we are in this together, and avoid the potential to pit "us" against "them" but rather work through this as a team. I would further caution each of us not to feel the urge to revert to the past practices of NCLB and AYP because it is more comfortable. The changes we are pursuing are those areas we have all talked about for years and we cannot miss this opportunity for change.

To access the PowerPoint used during my breakout session at the SSA Fall Conference, please click on the link http://www.alsde.edu/general/SSA_Fall_Conference_PLAN_2020_Oct_2012.pptx, and to access the PowerPoint used during our budget session, please click on the link http://www.alsde.edu/general/SSA_Fall_Conference_Budget_Update_Oct_2012.pptx. Also, I want to share the following WebEx recording with you. Click the link below to play it: <https://alsde.webex.com/alsde/k2/e.php?AT=RINF&recordingID=62740477>. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact Sherrill Parris at 334-242-8154 or me.

TRB:LAK

cc: Assessment Coordinators
Curriculum Coordinators

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