



NATIONAL COUNCIL OF  
TEACHERS OF MATHEMATICS

August 1, 2016

Ms. Meredith Miller  
U.S. Department of Education  
400 Maryland Avenue SW  
Room 3C106  
Washington, DC 20002-2800  
Transmitted via email to [Meredith.Miller@ed.gov](mailto:Meredith.Miller@ed.gov)

Re: Docket ID ED–2016–OESE–0032

Dear Ms Miller:

The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Department of Education’s proposed regulations on accountability, state plans, and state and local report cards in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). NCTM is the world’s largest mathematics education organization with 70,000 members and more than 230 Affiliates throughout the United States. NCTM is the public voice of mathematics education, supporting teachers to ensure equitable mathematics learning of the highest quality for all students through vision, leadership professional development, and research. Thank you for your consideration of these views.

**§ 200.15 Participation in Assessments and Annual Measurement of Achievement**

NCTM supports proposed § 200.15(a), which would require participation of 95 percent of all students and each subgroup of students under proposed § 200.16(a)(2), who are enrolled in each public school. The criteria for determining a subgroup should be small enough to ensure that particular subgroups are not systematically excluded from the accountability system. States where participation is less than 95 percent should have the flexibility to design interventions that may be less punitive than federally designed options. We also recommend that states collect data on the number of students who opt out of state assessments and that they report on the effect of opting out on instructional practices, teacher evaluation, and accountability measures.

It is critically important that assessments be of high quality to achieve the intended goals of the statute. NCTM supports the requirement of statewide assessments, especially adding flexibility related to locally selected high school assessments and



innovative assessment systems. However, for state assessments to effectively support students' learning as intended and to provide teachers, school leaders, parents, and students with useful and appropriate data and information, the following are essential:

- Assessments must assess all aspects of mathematical knowledge—procedural skills, conceptual understanding, problem solving, reasoning, and the ability to construct and evaluate mathematical arguments—at each grade and in high school. For this to occur, each state's assessments must include a performance assessment component. Using assessments that do not include a performance assessment component, such as SAT or ACT at the high school level, undermine rather than support students' mathematical preparation for college and careers. One of the strengths of ESSA is the requirement for state assessment to assess all aspects of the state's standards. Failure to require performance assessments is inconsistent with the requirement to assess the full intent of the standards.
- SEAs must allocate adequate testing time to allow for the inclusion of performance assessments. While we acknowledge that too much instructional time is often being used for assessment purposes, the problem is not the actual testing time. The problem is the amount of time spent on activities of questionable value that are intended to increase test scores, e.g., practice tests, test-prep activities, and benchmark testing to predict students' test scores.
- We encourage the Department to establish a mechanism to ensure that assessments used in different SEAs and LEAs are of comparably high quality in assessing students' mathematical proficiency.

We are concerned that one consequence of new requirements that focus only on the lower-performing schools may be that many marginally performing schools will have no incentive to improve. Consequently, we urge the Department to work with states to develop a system in which all schools will be held accountable for continuous improvement, with special attention to the performance of traditionally underperforming groups of students.

### **§ 200.19 Identification of Schools**

This section's preservation of disaggregating data to be able to identify underperforming groups of students is a key component of the law and a significant legacy left by No Child Left Behind. However, as others in the education community have noted, the current timeline for identifying schools in need of comprehensive support and improvement is ambitious. Rather than require many of these changes in 2017-2018, we would support changing 2017-2018 to 2018-2019 to allow states to use 2017-2018 data to identify schools for the next academic year.



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**§ 200.22 Targeted Support and Improvement**

We appreciate the intent behind creating a single accountability indicator that allows districts to look at more than just assessment results when evaluating school performance. While the Department's goal of a single rating is commendable, having a single federally mandated summative score for accountability purposes oversimplifies the complex nature and multiple factors that are part of school performance. At the very least, state education agencies should provide technical assistance for schools that will have the flexibility to take into account the unique needs of communities.

**§ 200.24 Resources to Support Continued Improvement**

NCTM supports the proposed regulation's inclusion of regulations with a "commitment to family and community engagement" as a priority for school improvement funds. Family engagement has too often been neglected and is critically important for school improvement and, more important, the higher achievement of students.

Finally, as some others in the education community have noted, we suggest changing the widely used, somewhat demeaning term of "subgroups" to "student groups" as a more respectful and neutral identifying term.

Thank you again for your consideration of these comments and suggestions. Please do not hesitate to contact NCTM Associate Executive Director for Communications Ken Krehbiel at (703) 620-9840 ext. 2012 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Matt Larson".

Matt Larson  
President

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert M. Doucette".

Robert M. Doucette  
Executive Director