



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY

NOV 17 2009

The Honorable Tom W. Kimbrell
Commissioner
Arkansas Department of Education
Four State Capitol Mall, Room 304 A
Little Rock, Arkansas 72201-1071

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CURRICULUM, ASSESSMENT
& RESEARCH UNIT

Dear Commissioner Kimbrell:

I am pleased to approve Arkansas' Benchmark Examinations in science in grades 5 and 7, Arkansas' end-of-course biology examination, and Arkansas' alternate science assessments based on alternate academic achievement standards in grades 5, 7, and 10 under Title I, Part A of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965* (ESEA), as amended. Combined with Arkansas' previously approved standards and assessments in reading/language arts and mathematics, Arkansas has a fully approved standards and assessment system under Title I of the ESEA. I congratulate you on this significant accomplishment.

My decision regarding Arkansas' general and alternate academic achievement standards in science, Benchmark Examinations in science in grades 5 and 7, Arkansas' end-of-course biology examination, and Arkansas' alternate science assessments based on alternate academic achievement standards in grades 5, 7, and 10 is based on input from peer reviewers external to the U.S. Department of Education (Department) and Department staff who reviewed and carefully considered the evidence submitted by Arkansas in October 2008, March 2009 and June 2009. I have concluded that the evidence provided demonstrates that Arkansas' Benchmark Examinations in science in grades 5 and 7, Arkansas' end-of-course biology examination, and Arkansas' alternate science assessments based on alternate academic achievement standards in grades 5, 7, and 10 satisfy the statutory and regulatory requirements under section 1111(b)(1) and (3) of the ESEA. As a result, Arkansas' standards and assessment system now includes academic content standards in reading/language arts, mathematics, and science; student academic achievement standards in reading/language arts, mathematics, and science; alternate academic achievement standards for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities in reading/language arts, mathematics, and science; general assessments in reading/language arts and mathematics in grades 3 through 8 and one grade in high school and general science assessments for each of three grade spans (grades 3-5, 6-9, and 10-12); and alternate assessments based on alternate academic achievement standards in the corresponding grades in reading/language arts, mathematics, and science. Accordingly, Arkansas' standards and assessment system warrants *Full Approval*. I have enclosed detailed comments from the peer review team that evaluated Arkansas' most recent submissions for your information.

Please be aware that approval of Arkansas' standards and assessment system under the ESEA is not a determination that the system complies with Federal civil rights requirements, including

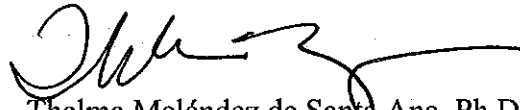
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The Department of Education's mission is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access.

Title VI of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964*, Title IX of the *Education Amendments of 1972*, Section 504 of the *Rehabilitation Act of 1973*, Title II of the *Americans with Disabilities Act*, and requirements under the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*. Finally, please remember that, if Arkansas makes significant changes to its standards and assessment system, Arkansas must submit information about those changes to the Department for review and approval.

We have found it a pleasure working with your staff on this review. Please accept my congratulations for Arkansas' approved standards and assessment system in reading/language arts, mathematics, and science. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Grace A. Ross at grace.ross@ed.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Thelma Meléndez de Santa Ana', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Thelma Meléndez de Santa Ana, Ph.D.

cc: Governor Mike Beebe
Dr. Gayle Potter