



OFFICE OF THE STATE
SUPERINTENDENT OF EDUCATION

August 13, 2026

Dear LEA Leaders,

I am writing to follow up on my [July letter](#) regarding the U.S. Department of Education's (USED) denial of Washington, DC's one-year accountability calculation and school improvement waiver request. As you may recall, USED provided OSSE with an opportunity to revise and resubmit the waiver request. After thoughtful discussion with stakeholders and careful consideration of the options before us, I have determined the best path forward for the District is to **not pursue waiver resubmission and instead move forward with next steps for our accountability calculation and school improvement designations.**

With the District moving to *DC CAPE Next*—our new statewide assessment—in the 2026-27 school year for English language arts (ELA) and mathematics, OSSE will have one year in which we cannot meaningfully calculate student growth. Throughout this process, LEAs and other education stakeholders have consistently emphasized that student growth is one of the most meaningful measures of school performance and should remain a significant component of DC's accountability system, particularly when making Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) designations. OSSE carefully considered maintaining the planned December 2027 designation timeline and temporarily removing student growth from accountability calculations. However, doing so would not reflect the consistent feedback we have received about the importance of student growth in measuring school quality. For these reasons, **OSSE remains committed to ensuring that student growth continues to be a meaningful component of the District's school accountability system and will make school improvement designations in December 2026**, one year earlier than scheduled.

As part of this process, LEAs and education stakeholders have been sharing ideas on possible updates to the District's school accountability system, and OSSE will work with our partners to update the school accountability system outlined in the ESSA State Plan in time for the **2029-30 school year**. The District is currently implementing several significant education initiatives, including our transition to *DC CAPE Next* for our statewide assessment, and updates to our high school graduation requirements. As such, OSSE believes that we will be in the strongest position to amend our ESSA State Plan and make changes to the District of Columbia's school accountability system after we have fully acclimated to *DC CAPE Next* and our new high graduation requirements. Additionally, beginning the new school accountability system in the 2029-30 school year is advantageous as it avoids changing the system during a year in which CSI designations will be made. (Following the designations made in December 2026, the next designation will be made in December 2029.)

Updating the ESSA State Plan will include stakeholder engagement and public comment, and requires approval by the DC State Board of Education and USED. OSSE will communicate key milestones and opportunities for LEA and stakeholder input as this work progresses. We look forward to beginning this work while ensuring any changes are proactive, appropriately sequenced, responsive to stakeholder feedback, and respectful of LEA capacity.

As we work together to update the ESSA State Plan, one of the changes to the plan that we will continue to contemplate is whether the District should discontinue end-of-course assessments in high school and transition to end-of-grade assessments. OSSE continues to believe that this is a strong option for the District, but it needs to be contemplated concurrently with changes to the school accountability system. Therefore, **end-of-course assessments will continue to be administered through at least Spring 2029** and any changes to assessments will be considered in conversations about the ESSA State Plan.

We anticipate discussing these topics and more at the August 19, 2026, LEA Leader Monthly Meeting & DC CAPE Assessment Briefing. In the meantime, please reach out to our OSSE.ESSA@dc.gov inbox if you have any initial feedback, suggestions, or questions. We look forward to working with you!

Thank you for your continued engagement and partnership with OSSE in these efforts. I look forward to speaking with you soon.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Antoinette S. Mitchell". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being more prominent.

Antoinette S. Mitchell, Ph.D.
State Superintendent of Education