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New Details Emerge on Duncan's NCLB Waiver Plan

By [Alyson Klein](#) on July 15, 2011 12:35 PM | [2 Comments](#) | [Recommend](#)

It's been about a month since U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan announced that, since Congress wasn't making significant progress on reauthorizing the current version of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, he would step in and offer waivers to states from parts of the law.

Now, of course, the big question is: What exactly would that mean?

The department has been mum so far (even to some members of Congress) but speculation about the specifics is high, [particularly among state chiefs](#).

Here's what is under discussion, according to sources:

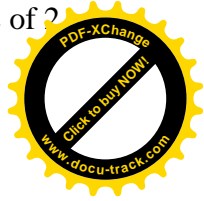
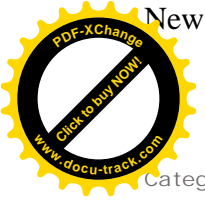
- There would be three kinds of waivers under No Child Left Behind, and states would have to sign up for all of them—it wouldn't be an either/or thing. This is something Duncan made clear in the [initial waiver](#) announcement.
- To waive the 2014 deadline for all students to be proficient in math and language arts, states would have to adopt college- and career-readiness standards and assessments. It's not clear yet what that would mean. But, presumably, Common Core would be involved. Student growth could be used to measure achievement.
- To essentially freeze in place the law's system of sanctions, states would have to propose their own differentiated accountability systems that would incorporate growth and establish new performance targets. States also would have to establish differentiated school improvement systems that more accurately meet the needs of schools with different challenges. The accountability systems would not have to include choice or free tutoring. Districts also no longer would have to set aside Title I money for such programs.
- To waive the law's highly qualified teacher requirement and get funding flexibility, states would have to adopt evaluation systems for teachers and principals that are based on growth and make sure districts actually do what they say they're going to do.

Apparently, the four models under the current School Improvement Grant program are the most significant sticking point in discussions of what the waivers should look like.

Politics K-12 take: Sounds like the department is trying to get as many states as possible on board with the waiver plan, since the "reforms" being considered are not as onerous/innovative as the requirements for the Race to the Top program.

It also sounds like none of this is yet set in stone. The White House is heavily involved in the waiver discussion. And the administration is trying to get top Democrats in Congress, particularly Rep. George Miller, D-Calif., and Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, on board. Both have [dissed](#) the idea of waivers.

Will this play in states? Indiana Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Bennett, who's had conversations with Duncan about the waiver plan, told Michele he supports the idea that states propose their own differentiated accountability plans. But he also noted such a process might take time, especially if those plans have to go through a lengthy peer review process.



Categories: Arne Duncan,ESEA,No Child Left Behind

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