



STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
LANSING



JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM
GOVERNOR

THOMAS D. WATKINS, JR.
SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC
INSTRUCTION

February 14, 2003

TO: Local and Intermediate School Superintendents and Public School Academy Directors
FROM: Thomas D. Watkins, Jr.
SUBJECT: URGENT--Immediate Response Required to Guarantee Continuance of Federal Funding

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) has brought us many new requirements and challenges. We are faced with a new one today.

On February 7, 2003, the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) released a guidance document covering Section 9524 of NCLB, constitutionally protected prayer in public elementary and secondary schools. It requires that each local or intermediate school district or public school academy, as a condition of receiving funds under any portion of the NCLB, annually certify, in writing to the state agency, that it has no policy that prevents, or otherwise denies participation in, constitutionally protected prayer in public schools. Complete details are provided in the guidance that can be found on the Michigan Department of Education's (MDE) website, as given below.

The effective date for this provision was October 1, 2002. Since the guidance was only recently completed, USDOE has advised us that districts are being given an extension to March 15, 2003, to submit this certification to the Michigan Department of Education. MDE is then required by April 15, 2003, to provide the USDOE a list of all districts not providing MDE with this certification. A district's failure to submit the required certification may result in the district's loss of funding under NCLB. Grant programs covered by Section 9524 include Title I, Reading First, Charter Schools, 21st Century Community Learning Centers, and many others.

Each district is asked to provide written certification of compliance with this section by March 15, 2003. A sample letter of certification, along with the USDOE guidance, may be found on the MDE website at: www.michigan.gov/mde. Click on the "No Child Left Behind" button on the right. Go to the "What's New" section under Section 9524 – Constitutionally Protected Prayer. The certification letter should be written on the district's letterhead, signed by the superintendent, and mailed to:

Thomas D. Watkins, Jr.
Michigan Department of Education
Section 9524 Certification
PO Box 30008
Lansing, MI 48909

Your immediate attention to this matter is requested. We thank you for complying with the announced time line for the collection of the 2002-03 certification. Efforts are being made to obtain this information in an electronic format in future years.