



STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
LANSING


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GOVERNOR

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INTERIM STATE SUPERINTENDENT

MEMORANDUM

DATE: August 9, 2018

TO: Local and Intermediate School District Superintendents
Public School Academy Directors

FROM: Venessa A. Keesler, Ph.D., Deputy Superintendent 
Division of Educator, Student, and School Supports

SUBJECT: Request for Feedback and Comments on Draft ESSA Waivers on Science and English Learner Assessments

The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) is requesting a waiver from the United States Department of Education (USED) from specific science and English learner (EL) state assessment and accountability regulatory requirements under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

Per the guidelines, the MDE is posting a draft of both waivers for public comment before official submission to USED for consideration.

- The draft waiver request for **science assessment** may be viewed at: https://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/Betsy_DeVos_Science_Waiver_Letter_080918_629578_7.pdf
- The draft waiver request for **English learner assessment** may be viewed at: https://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/Betsy_DeVos_EL_Waiver_Letter_080918_629577_7.pdf

Individuals wishing to comment on the science assessment waiver request should submit comments to MDE-OEAA@michigan.gov by **August 24, 2018**. Please include the phrase "ESSA Waiver Comments-Science" in the email subject line.

Individuals wishing to comment on English learner assessment waiver request should submit comments to MDE-OEAA@michigan.gov by **September 14, 2018**. Please include the phrase "ESSA Waiver Comments-EL" in the email subject line.

Questions may be directed to Andrew Middlestead at middlesteada@michigan.gov.

Summary of Science Assessment Waiver

The adoption of Michigan's new science standards in the fall of 2016 initiated the complete overhaul of science education in Michigan and created the need to replace past versions of Michigan's M-STEP Science assessment with a new redesigned system, aligned to our new science content standards. The MDE is well underway in

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the development of these new tests and is conducting large-scale field-testing of these new assessments during the 2017-18 and 2018-19 school years. The MDE is formally requesting a waiver that, if granted, will allow Michigan to not double-test or report student test scores for the 2017-18 or 2018-19 school years (SYs) for the administration of the full-census field test of the M-STEP science assessments.

The approval of the waiver request will allow Michigan to:

- Field test the new M-STEP science assessments, aligned to our new standards, without creating a double-testing situation for all eligible students enrolled in grades five and eight and once in high school.
- Suspend past versions of the M-STEP science tests, which are based on outdated science standards, and provide a signal to Michigan educators to transition their daily classroom instruction from the previous science content standards to the new Michigan Science Standards.
- Temporarily suspend the required reporting of individual student scores for the 2017-18 and 2018-19 SYs for these large-scale field-test years. Michigan still intends to provide USED student participation rates for the field test at school-, district-, and county-levels.

ESSA Section 1111(b)(1) and (2) requires a state educational agency to apply the same academic achievement standards, and to use the same academic assessments, for all public-school children in the state. Michigan requests a waiver of this requirement so that any eligible student enrolled in a Michigan public or charter school will be permitted to take only the field-test assessment as the science assessment. The waiver will ensure that students already receiving instruction aligned with the new Michigan Science Standards will not lose valuable instruction time in preparation for tests aligned with outdated science standards—tests that would yield results that do not have any educational benefit for students, teachers, or parents.

It will also reduce the potential stress and psychological impact of extended standardized testing on students. Allowing Michigan schools to avoid the administration of double-testing in science will provide students with the opportunity to become familiar with the new computer-based assessments in science with no undue concerns about immediate academic consequence.

Students will experience the new item types and functionality that have been developed in line with our new standards and will benefit from engaging with the new items built for our new standards.

In addition to validity and fairness, the application of testing-industry standards and practices to any new assessment system through pilot and field-testing ensures the reliability of the assessments and improves the quality and meaning of their results.

Brief Summary of English Learner Assessment Waiver

The MDE laid out its intent to seek an English learner assessment waiver in its approved ESSA plan submitted to USED. The MDE is now seeking an official waiver from the department to amend the assessment and accountability timeline for recently arrived English learner students. This requested waiver, if approved, would advance student achievement, better serve students, and maintain or improve transparency in reporting to parents and the public on student achievement and school performance.

The approved waiver would allow Michigan to enact the following scenario:

- In year one of enrollment, students will take WIDA Access for ELLs and be exempt from the ELA state assessment. WIDA results will be included in the EL Progress component of the Michigan School Index System.
- In year two of enrollment, students will take WIDA and the ELA state assessment. WIDA results will be included in the EL Progress component of the Michigan School Index System.
- In year three of enrollment, students will take WIDA and the ELA state assessment. WIDA results will be included in the EL Progress component, and ELA results will be included in the Academic Growth component of the Michigan School Index System.
- In year four of enrollment, students will take WIDA and the ELA state assessment. WIDA results will be included in the EL Progress component, and ELA results will be included in the Academic Growth and Academic Proficiency components of the Michigan School Index System.

cc: Michigan Education Alliance