



STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
LANSING

GRETCHEN WHITMER
GOVERNOR

MICHAEL F. RICE, Ph.D.
STATE SUPERINTENDENT

March 17, 2020

Ms. Betsy DeVos, Secretary of Education
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary DeVos:

During the COVID-19 crisis, we write to strongly urge that you waive the requirement that students *nationally* take state summative assessments.

As you are aware, states across the country, including Michigan, have closed schools for at least three weeks, as have many districts in states that have not yet closed their schools entirely. It is certainly possible that these closures could extend further into the spring in parts of the country.

Last Friday, we inquired of the United States Department of Education if we were permitted to cancel or waive the requirement to do annual state testing under the federal Every Student Succeeds Act. We were told that such permission was possible only if the window for state testing overlapped with the closure period. In Michigan, ours does not. Rather, our three-week closure period goes from Monday, March 16 until Sunday, April 5. Many schools have spring break the following week of April 6, and our testing window begins the week of April 13. In other words, assuming that our school closure ends April 5, for these districts, the first day back at school would be April 13, and students would begin to test April 14.

For a variety of reasons, this is not simply an undesirable situation; it is a completely unacceptable one. Many children will struggle with the long absence from school. It will take many districts a considerable period of time to resume normal functioning, not to mention refocusing on the instruction of children.

When we return to school, the focus should be on tending to children's immediate needs: physical, socioemotional, and academic. In many cases, children will have experienced trauma. In other cases, they will simply need to be re-acclimated into their schools. In all cases, students will have missed instruction, and this lost instruction will render any conclusions about test results dubious,

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especially any comparisons across school years and in light of the pending public health concerns of parents, students, and staff.

Upon return to school, our focus *nationally* should be on instruction, supports, and nurturing of students, not on state summative assessments. Any state summative assessment results would not be an accurate reflection of student learning given the tremendous disruption in children's education and lives during this extraordinary period.

By waiving the requirement *nationally* to provide state assessments under ESSA, you help schools put students first and focus on providing the supports that students will need in the coming weeks and months.

Thank you for your consideration of the needs of our children.

Sincerely,



Michael F. Rice, Ph.D.
Michigan Superintendent
of Public Instruction



Casandra E. Ulbrich, Ph.D.
President, State Board of Education

cc: State Board of Education
Governor Gretchen Whitmer
U.S. Senator Gary Peters
U.S. Senator Debbie Stabenow
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