



STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
LANSING

GRETCHEN WHITMER
GOVERNOR

MICHAEL F. RICE, Ph.D.
STATE SUPERINTENDENT

MEMORANDUM

DATE: July 1, 2020

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

FROM: Michael F. Rice, Ph.D., State Superintendent 

SUBJECT: Request to Waiver Federal Requirements for Assessments and Accountability

Yesterday, I joined State Board of Education President Dr. Casandra Ulbrich in a [letter](#) to U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos to request the continuation of waivers to the federal requirements for student assessments and school accountability for the 2020-21 school year, as a result of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Dr. Ulbrich and I prompted Secretary DeVos back in March to allow for nationwide waivers to federal laws requiring student testing and school accountability. Secretary DeVos and the U.S. Department of Education proceeded and approved waivers for Michigan and other states.

As you all know well, schools across the country, including in Michigan, were closed for all or large parts of the spring. Our state health officials are monitoring daily the status of the pandemic and the pandemic's spread. The COVID-19 virus continues to adversely affect the ways in which Americans live, work, and go to school.

Educators are preparing as a state and as 831 local education agencies (LEAs) and 56 intermediate school districts for a return to school. That said, we understand that there is a strong possibility that a second wave of the pandemic could require schools to close again to protect the lives of Michiganders. As of this morning, according to the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, Michigan has had 63,870 positive cases of COVID-19 and 5,947 COVID-19-related deaths. The Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center noted that the United States, as of Monday, had confirmed 2.5 million cases with almost 126,000 deaths, approximately 25 percent of the 10.2 million cases and 503,000 deaths worldwide.

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Many children are struggling with the long absence from school. When we return to school, it will take many districts a considerable period of time to resume somewhat normal functioning in the midst of a pandemic and the attendant mitigation efforts, not to mention the refocusing on the instruction of children and the use of locally chosen benchmark assessments to gauge the extent of foregone learning during the school shutdown from March to June.

The long absence from in-person instruction will present challenges for many students. The focus this fall should be on tending to children's immediate needs: physical, socioemotional, and academic.

Given the last three months, students need more time next year to focus on the essential. Upon return to school, our focus should be on instruction, supports, the nurturing of students, and safe school environments, and not on lengthy state summative assessments.

We will continue to keep you informed on any related developments.

cc: Michigan Education Alliance
Confederation of Michigan Tribal Education Directors