



STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
LANSING

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GOVERNOR

MICHAEL F. RICE, Ph.D.
STATE SUPERINTENDENT

MEMORANDUM

DATE: December 8, 2020

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

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

SUBJECT: Spring 2021 State Assessments - MEMO #COVID-19-142

Though a requirement of federal and state law to administer statewide assessments every year, the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) will again be seeking a waiver of the federal requirement to administer the spring 2021 assessments due to the enduring pandemic. I shared this continued commitment at today's State Board of Education meeting.

Last Thursday's *Spotlight on Student Assessments and Accountability* newsletter stated that MDE is planning on administering assessments this spring. To comply with current law, MDE must *prepare for* the required spring assessments *in the event* that the United States Department of Education (USED) does not grant our waiver request. In no way should this preparation for a statutory requirement be perceived as support for this requirement or as an indication that we will not be submitting another request to waive state summative assessments.

Many schools across the country, including many in Michigan, were closed the final third of last school year and have been closed portions of this school year. Many of the schools that have remained open for most if not all of this school year have had reduced enrollments, a function of parent choice during the pandemic. For reasons clear to most educators, this is not the time to administer state summative assessments.

In underscoring the difficulty of administering broad-based assessments at this time, the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) [announced](#) two weeks ago that the federal National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) assessments have been postponed this year for schools across the country. The concerns of the NCES are similar to concerns that I have with the administration of state summative assessments this year.

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In the NAEP postponement two weeks ago, however, some argued at the federal level that the postponement of NAEP until spring of 2022 meant that state summative assessments were more necessary than they otherwise would have been if NAEP was administered this spring. This is illogical. If we can't administer a federal test for which only a sample of students is assessed, we certainly shouldn't try to test an entire population over the better part of the spring. Children have lost so much instructional time; they shouldn't lose more to M-STEP.

Actually, the postponement of NAEP doesn't make more important the administration of M-STEP; rather, it makes more important the locally chosen, locally administered benchmark assessments that school districts use annually to determine where children are academically and what they need to do to help children in their reading, writing, and math. These tests are less time consuming and less disruptive in a pandemic than M-STEP, generate results quickly, permit the modification of instruction based on the results, and help us understand at the student, school, and school district levels what course alterations need to take place. Benchmark assessments are required by law this school year and help answer the question where our children are academically in the pandemic.

In March 2020, MDE submitted a waiver to USED to waive the spring state assessments, which was approved. MDE submitted an additional waiver in the summer relative to the spring 2021 assessments. That request was denied by the U.S. Department of Education. I remain committed to re-applying for a federal waiver for state summative assessments this winter.

In the meantime, MDE is preparing for state assessments this spring under a range of possible scenarios. With that consideration, MDE asks local districts to continue following the processes and procedures to prepare for a possible spring assessment with the hope that our federal waiver request this winter will be approved by the U.S. Department of Education in the enduring pandemic.

cc: Michigan Education Alliance
Confederation of Michigan Tribal Education Directors