



STATE OF MICHIGAN  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
LANSING

GRETCHEN WHITMER  
GOVERNOR

MICHAEL F. RICE, Ph.D.  
STATE SUPERINTENDENT

**MEMORANDUM**

**DATE:** March 12, 2021

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

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

**SUBJECT:** Request for State Summative Assessment and Accountability Waivers  
MEMO #COVID-19-166

The strong efforts to seek federal waivers associated with administration of the spring 2021 M-STEP assessments and school accountability requirements continue.

In support of our January 25 waiver request found [here](#), we have had two meetings with U.S. Department of Education (USED) officials regarding Michigan's waiver request. On Tuesday, the State Board of Education unanimously approved [a resolution](#) to urge the state legislature to set aside this year the state law that requires state summative assessments.

A federally required request for public comment on our request for waivers received 298 responses, with 96 percent of the responses supportive of the waiver request.

State Board of Education President Dr. Casandra Ulbrich and I wrote an Op Ed that was the focus of an [article](#) in the Washington Post this week. It lays out the case for using benchmark assessments, mandated for this year late last summer by the state legislature, to inform educators of where individual children are in reading and math, share with parents, and target resources, interventions, and supports as needed based on the results.

As many of you may recall, our waiver request to USED is for both the assessments themselves and the high-stakes accountability elements associated therewith (e.g., the federally approved index accountability system, the targeting of schools for improvement supports, and the 95 percent test participation rate, among others). USED will make an individual determination on each element for which we have requested waiver.

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MDE staff are working with the state legislature for state relief, pending the outcome of the federal waiver request. While there are some of you that may value the administration of state summative tests this school year, many of you—and almost every state education association and many of your parents—have expressed opposition thereto. To share your reflections with your state legislators would be helpful. In the pandemic, I feel strongly that teacher, administrator, and support staff time this spring is better spent with students on social and emotional and academic growth as opposed to state summative assessments, particularly given the presence of mandatory benchmark assessments this year.

That said, state testing turns on whether our federal waiver request is approved. If it is not—or if accountability waivers are approved and assessment waivers are not—we will be announcing an opportunity of an expanded testing window for this spring, given the delay in USED's answer to our request.

Thank you for your partnership on this important matter.

cc: Michigan Education Alliance  
Confederation of Michigan Tribal Education Directors