



Press Release

Contact: Martin Ackley, Director of Public and Governmental Affairs, 517-241-4395
Bill DiSessa, Spokesperson, 517-335-6649

MDE To Explore Federal Flexibility Opportunity for Assessments and Accountability

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LANSING – The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) will be exploring federal flexibility announced by the U.S. Department of Education (USED) Monday evening on state assessment and accountability requirements, MDE announced.

“I appreciate that, during the pandemic, the U.S. Department of Education has recognized the need for a number of flexibilities, including school identification, accountability, and participation rate,” said State Superintendent Dr. Michael Rice.

USED announced that, on an individual basis, it will consider flexibility for states on administering assessments based on the specific circumstances across or within the state, and that it will work with states to address their individual needs and conditions while ensuring the maximum available data to inform the targeting of resources and supports.

“The Michigan legislature passed and the governor signed into law last summer the requirement that local districts administer locally chosen, locally administered benchmark assessments to provide parents and educators with the knowledge of where children are academically and to help target resources and supports as a result,” Dr. Rice said.

“Given this important decision, the absence of blanket waivers of assessments this year, and the U.S. Department of Education’s recognition of the possible need for additional state flexibility based on specific circumstances, the Michigan Department of Education will be reaching out to and working with the U.S. Department of Education to share the value of the benchmark assessments administered statewide during this year.”

MDE has requested from the USED a waiver from the federal requirement to administer the statewide summative assessments to Michigan students this spring and waive school accountability measures resulting from those statewide assessments.

A majority of Michigan students have received inconsistent to no instruction in an in-person format during the 2020-21 school year, MDE noted in its waiver request, and when these students return to in-person instruction, the focus should be on teaching and learning and ensuring social and emotional wellness rather than on preparing for and taking state summative assessments.

In its announcement Monday evening, USED invited states to request a waiver for the 2020-2021 school year of the accountability and school identification requirements in the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). A state receiving this waiver would not be required to implement and report the results of its federally approved accountability system.

Beyond the scope of these waivers, USED is also encouraging states and school districts to consider other steps within their purview to further reduce the stakes of assessments this year, such as excluding their use from students' final grades and grade promotion decisions.

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