



Press Release

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Public Comment Provides Overwhelming Support for Federal Waiver Request to Statewide Tests

March 16, 2021

LANSING – Public comment regarding a request to waive the federal requirements to administer the statewide summative assessment this school year ran overwhelmingly supportive, the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) reported today.

Federal waiver requests require public comment to be sought. A public comment period was offered for three weeks, from January 25 to February 12, 2021. There were 298 comments made by the public, with 96 percent of those comments supportive of the waiver request.

“The strong efforts to seek federal waivers associated with administration of the spring 2021 M-STEP assessments and school accountability requirements continue,” said State Superintendent Dr. Michael Rice. “This overwhelming support voiced during the public comment period provides added evidence that this is not the time to burden students and schools with these statewide assessments.”

As a result of the substantial disruption of instruction due to the COVID-19 pandemic, MDE requested the U.S. Department of Education (USED) to waive the federal requirement 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).

In advancing its request for waiver, MDE noted that it had supported, the state legislature had passed, and the governor had signed into law last summer the requirement for all districts in the state to administer locally chosen, national benchmark assessments in the beginning and end of the school year. Benchmark assessments have been a consistent tool of many districts over the last several years to help educators determine where children are in reading and math and to share these data with parents. Benchmark assessments are also useful to local school districts to help to target resources and to determine interventions and supports for students.

The department's request for waiver of end-of-year state assessments is in the context of the new statutory requirement for benchmark assessments, the cognizance of the value of the benchmark assessments, and the need to safeguard time for social emotional and academic supports of children this spring.

MDE has met with USED regarding the waiver request, and USED will make an individual determination on each element for which MDE has requested a waiver. In the event federal waivers are granted, similar state laws will need to be waived for this school year. Earlier this month, 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.

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