



Press Release

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USED Denies Michigan's Request to Waive Federal Requirement to Test Students During a Pandemic

April 6, 2021

LANSING – The U.S. Department of Education (USED) has [denied](#) Michigan's request to waive the federal requirement to administer the state summative assessments, the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) reported today.

In late January, given the COVID-19 pandemic that has disrupted the education of Michigan's 1.5 million students, MDE [requested](#) waivers to federal requirements for state summative tests, as well as waivers of associated high-stakes accountability requirements. The accountability waivers were approved on March 26.

State Superintendent Dr. Michael Rice and State Board of Education President Dr. Casandra Ulbrich explained in an OpEd that ran both [nationally](#) and in [Michigan](#) that it has been a brutally difficult school year for students, parents, and educators and that it would be made worse if schools are forced to spend a good portion of the spring on Michigan's year-end state summative tests when teachers could better spend that time working with their students.

As an alternative to the state summative tests, MDE argued that locally chosen and administered national benchmark assessments, required by state law last summer for this school year, would be more beneficial in providing parents and educators with the knowledge of where children are academically and to help target resources and supports as a result.

Dr. Rice noted the following regarding the denial of the assessment waiver request:

"With its decision today to deny Michigan's request to waive M-STEP testing in the midst of the pandemic, USED continues to demonstrate its disconnect from conditions in public schools in Michigan and across the country. Michigan has the highest rates of recent COVID-19 cases and recent cases per 100,000 in the nation at the moment. Our state legislators and governor had the foresight to require districts to administer benchmark assessments in the fall and in the spring of this school year to provide data to educators and parents and to help target

resources, interventions, and supports to students in districts. USED even canceled its own assessment—the National Assessment of Educational Progress—in November, an acknowledgement of the pandemic at that time.

“For a state that has mandated benchmark assessments this year to inform educators and parents of where students are in reading and math, USED’s lockstep allegiance in a pandemic to state summative assessments such as M-STEP is simply fidelity to two decades of education policy drift under the federal No Child Left Behind Act and its uncreative and still punitive offspring.

“Is it any wonder that educators are leaving the profession when, in a pandemic, USED insists that Michigan use time, which should be dedicated to children’s social emotional and academic growth, to test a portion of its students to generate data that will inform precisely nothing about our children’s needs that we won’t already know more substantially and quickly with benchmark assessments this year?”

State Board of Education President Dr. Casandra Ulbrich also had sharp criticism of USED’s decision.

“This is beyond disappointing. It's shameful,” Dr. Ulbrich said. “USED had an opportunity to do the right thing for the right reasons, and instead chose to appease special interests rather than support students. Michigan citizens, educators and parents will get virtually no useful and actionable information from this year’s state tests. It would be shameful now if the state legislature used these 'results' to impose negative consequences on children or schools.”

With USED denying Michigan’s request to waive the federal requirement for state summative assessments, local school districts will be expected to administer the state tests as scheduled. These tests include M-STEP for students in grades 3-8; PSAT 8/9 for students in 8th grade; MME, including SAT, for students in 11th grade; MI-ACCESS for students receiving special education services in grades 3-8 and 11; and WIDA for students in English learner programs in grades K-12.

MDE has informed school districts that during the COVID-19 pandemic, it does not support requiring otherwise remote or virtual students to be brought into school solely for the purpose of state assessment. Districts will have to *offer* remote or virtual students the opportunity to come into school to take the appropriate state summative assessments. However, those remote-only students will *not be required* to come into school for the sole purpose of taking the assessments.

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