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January 21, 2021

MEMORANDUM

TO: Superintendents, Charter School Administrators, District Test Coordinators (DTCs)

FROM: Gwen Perea Warniment, PhD, Deputy Secretary of Teaching, Learning, and Assessment

RE: Spring 2021 Testing Window

Education leaders and teachers have gone to unprecedented lengths to provide continuous instruction through varied combinations of in-person, virtual, and hybrid learning modes. In this fluid and transient environment, the regular challenges of assessing what and how students are learning have become even more complicated. PED believes that the statewide large-scale assessment provides valuable information for understanding what students have learned since the COVID-19 pandemic caused disruptions to regular schooling, but recognizes the challenges that schools and districts are facing.

Currently, PED is submitting an [addendum](#) to the U.S. Department of Education that would waive most federal school accountability requirements. [Public comment](#) on this addendum closes on January 21, 2021. Concurrently, PED is in the process of gathering public comment to submit a [waiver](#) to forego the annual assessment requirement under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) to shift into an opt-in testing model in spring 2021. PED recognizes that status quo school assessment and accountability is likely not appropriate this year, which is why PED, as well as our colleagues in most other states, have requested the maximum flexibility from ESSA requirements. Should PED need to alter testing activities, including changes in federal allowances, challenges to the waiver, or pandemic risks, PED will be poised to adjust quickly.

High quality assessments are important tools used to gather data about student performance. Results from these assessments help educators and parents understand where students are making progress, and where they are falling behind. PED also recognizes that instructional time is valuable, and interruptions should be limited. In light of the opt-in model, districts and charters should be thoughtful about which assessments they want to administer. Primary in these considerations is determining if students have an opportunity to learn the content measured by the assessment.

Supporting Schools, Students, and Families

Given the priority of ensuring student, staff, and community safety, PED recognizes that certain circumstances may inhibit the school's ability to test. No family should be required to have a student participate in state testing in light of health concerns or perceived risks.

Assessment Program Adjustments

The following adjustments apply for the remainder of the 2020-21 school year:

Middle of Year (MOY) and End of Year (EOY) Progress Monitoring

Continued use of remote administration for interim assessments: Istation (K-2) and iMSSA (3-8) will continue to be made available for remote (online from home) and onsite administration. This will allow educators and students to gain an understanding of where students are in relation to grade-level expectations. The EOY iMSSA interim assessment is highly encouraged in lieu of summative MSSA assessments for those districts opting out of MSSA participation.

Spring 2021 Summative Assessments

Summative ESSA assessments are available to LEAs for optional administration: To ensure valid test scores and maintain test security, spring summative assessments must be administered and proctored onsite. DTCs will need to ensure correct test assignments based on the [revised guidance](#).

Adjust testing windows to meet local needs. All spring summative assessments are secure. PED has lengthened the test administration windows and added additional testing dates where possible. The [revised assessment calendar](#) is now available on the District Test Coordinator (DTC) resource page.

Supporting Resources

The 2020-21 Assessment Calendar and Test Administration Guidance have been updated to reflect the adjustments presented in this memorandum. To assist with any questions DTCs might have regarding this memorandum and opt-in considerations, the Assessment Bureau will be hosting flexible testing guidance webinars during the week of DTC training. For those districts, opting to participate in spring testing, winter DTC training will take place on February 2 – 4, 2021. Additionally, PED will provide a formal guidance document outlining testing considerations to support local decision-making.

cc: Ryan Stewart, EdLD, Secretary
Tim Hand, PhD, Deputy Secretary
Alexis Álvarez, PhD, Director of Accountability
Lynn Vásquez, Division Director of Assessment & Learning Management Systems
New Mexico Assessment & Accountability Advisory Committee
New Mexico Technical Advisory Committee