



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

April 6, 2021

The Honorable Linda Darling-Hammond
State Board President
California State Board of Education
1430 N Street, Room 5111
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Tony Thurmond
State Superintendent of Education
California Department of Education
1430 N Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Dr. Darling-Hammond and Superintendent Thurmond:

I am writing in response to California's letter on April 2, 2021, regarding the State's plan for administering statewide assessments in reading/language arts, mathematics, and science, as required under section 1111(b)(2)(B)(i) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), to all public elementary and secondary school students in the State.

We remain committed to supporting all States in assessing the learning of all students. Obtaining data on student learning includes high-quality statewide assessments, which can help identify where opportunity gaps are persistent and have been exacerbated – particularly during the pandemic – and, along with other data, can help States direct resources and support to close those gaps. At the same time, we must also recognize that we are in the midst of a pandemic that requires real flexibility.

I appreciate the information shared in your letter and in recent conversations between our staff about the approach you are taking in California. Based on the information you have provided, our understanding is that a waiver is not required at this time because California is administering all of its required assessments and all school districts will be required to administer the statewide summative assessments except in any instances where the State concludes it is not viable to administer the assessment because of the pandemic.¹ I also appreciated hearing about the work you have done to shorten the assessments for this year and extend the test window to provide greater flexibility in the administration.

¹ Please note that viability refers to the ability to administer the statewide summative assessment given a district's specific circumstances in the context of the pandemic. It does not provide an opportunity for States or school districts to choose to administer local assessments in place of the statewide summative assessment.

We recognize that participation statewide may be lower than in prior years. As I noted in my letter to all States on February 22, the Department does not believe that if there are places where students are unable to attend school safely in person because of the pandemic they should be brought into school buildings for the sole purpose of taking a test. As the Department has also stated, in cases where students are unable to take the statewide summative assessment, we hope that States and districts use other assessments to measure student learning and progress and to provide information to parents and educators. These interim, diagnostic, or formative assessments do not replace statewide summative assessments, but they can serve to provide valuable information to meet our goal of maximizing the number of students for whom we have quality data this year.

We appreciate the challenges you, your school districts, and your schools are facing this year. Having statewide assessment data that are based on your State's academic and content standards for as many students as possible is important to provide useful information to parents, educators, and the public, and to address existing and increased gaps in opportunity. If you have any questions, please contact me or my staff at ESEA.Assessment@ed.gov.

Sincerely,

/s/

Ian Rosenblum
Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy and
Programs
Delegated the Authority to Perform the
Functions and Duties of the Assistant Secretary
Office of Elementary and Secondary Education

cc: Rachael Maves, Deputy Superintendent of Public Instruction, CDE
Brooks Allen, Executive Director, SBE