

U.S. Department of Education Releases Guidance to States on Assessing Student Learning During the Pandemic

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Contact: Press Office, (202) 401-1576, press@ed.gov

<https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/us-department-education-releases-guidance-states-assessing-student-learning-during-pandemic>

Today, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) is providing guidance to states emphasizing the importance of flexibility in administering assessments this year as a result of the pandemic and supporting the use of assessment data as a source of information for parents and educators to target resources and support, rather than for accountability purposes this year.

State assessments and accountability systems play an important role in advancing educational equity, identifying student needs, and targeting the resources to address them. At the same time, some schools and districts may not be able to safely administer statewide summative assessments this spring using their standard practices, while others may wish to prioritize learning time during the scant in-person schooling time this year in many communities. The pandemic requires that states have significant flexibility in implementing this work for the 2020-2021 school year and ED's guidance is a practical approach that balances these two priorities.

"The Department of Education is committed to supporting all states in assessing student learning during the pandemic to help target resources and support to the students with the greatest needs," said Ian Rosenblum, acting assistant secretary for elementary and secondary education. "We also recognize that at a time when everything in our education system is different, there need to be different ways that states can administer state tests like moving them to the fall so that precious in-person learning time this year can be spent on instruction. Balancing these priorities is the best approach."

ED's guidance makes clear that states should consider the ways they can do things differently this year. Flexibility available to states includes:

- Extending the testing window and moving assessments to the summer or fall,
- Giving the assessment remotely, where feasible,
- Shortening the state assessment, to make testing more feasible to implement and prioritize in-person learning time.

The Department also recognizes that individual states may need additional assessment flexibility based on the specific circumstances across or within the state. ED is prepared to work with states to address their individual needs and conditions while ensuring the maximum available statewide data to inform the targeting of resources and support.

In addition to encouraging flexibility around assessments, ED is allowing states to request a waiver for the Every Student Succeeds Act's accountability and school identification requirements. This flexibility will explicitly include waiving the accountability provisions relating to having a 95 percent test participation rate.

The Department's letter to Chief State School Officers outlining its plans for the 2020-2021 school year can be found [here](#).

"States are working hard to respond to the unique circumstances they are facing and maintain their immediate focus on supporting students' social, emotional, and academic development," said Jessica Cardichon, deputy assistant secretary of K-12, Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development. "In addition to this guidance, the Administration is working with Congress to secure the additional resources in the American Rescue Plan that are needed to support states and districts in safely reopening schools and responding to the long-term impact of COVID on students and educators."

The steps taken today by the Department of Education reflect a practical approach for addressing the immediate crisis at hand. The Department will continue to engage a broad range of stakeholders regarding how the Biden-Harris Administration can best implement its agenda to prepare all students to succeed in the tomorrow's economy, regardless of race, parents' income, zip code, or disability; and to provide educators with the support, respect and dignity they deserve. President Biden's proposed American Rescue Plan calls for \$130 billion in funding to help schools safely reopen and meet the unique needs students and educators are facing during the pandemic, including supporting the academic, social, and emotional needs of students.

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