



February 10, 2021

The Honorable Ruth Ryder
Deputy Assistant Secretary
U.S. Department of Education
Office of Elementary and Secondary Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20202

Sent Via Email: ESEA.Assessment@ed.gov

Honorable Ruth Ryder:

During the 2020-21 school year, students across Minnesota have experienced significant and profound changes to their learning environments, while teachers and school administrators accessed widely divergent tools and resources to continue engaging students in K–12 public education. Within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) understands students are experiencing significant shifts in learning; experts and lawmakers agree that the COVID-19 pandemic will have the most severe impact on populations underserved by and experiencing systemic bias from Minnesota public systems.

MDE takes seriously our responsibility to evaluate K–12 student outcomes to remediate where there are shortfalls in student opportunities for rigorous coursework and to identify and scale-up best practices within our pledge to end education disparities. The agency collects statewide student assessment data as part of efforts to do so. Without further direction or instruction from the U.S. Department of Education, MDE will continue with school year 2020–21 statewide student assessments.

MDE requests that United States Department of Education (USED) consider providing states expedited waivers for:

- Report card provisions related to certain assessments and accountability in section 1111(h) based on data from the 2020–21 school year.
- Participation requirements in section 1005(c)(4)(E).
- English learner exit criteria requiring a proficient score on the English Language Proficiency assessment allowing the state to develop alternative exit criteria in the case a student cannot complete the English language proficiency accountability assessment (ACCESS).

- Accountability and school identification requirements in sections 1111(c)(4) and 1111(d)(2)(C)-(D): the requirements that annually a State shall meaningfully differentiate all public schools and the requirements to identify schools for comprehensive and targeted support and improvement and additional targeted support and improvement based on data from the 2020–21 school year.

My colleagues and I at MDE stand ready to work with you on these and any other measures where we can be helpful, so that we may continue to best meet the needs of all our students. Thank you for your work alongside us.

Together,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary Cathryn Ricker". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mary Cathryn Ricker, NBCT
Commissioner

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