



# ASSESSMENT FLEXIBILITY GUIDANCE

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## INTRODUCTION

State leaders are deeply committed to providing information to parents, educators, and the public about student performance to help target resources and supports quickly and effectively. Some state leaders have examined the context in their respective states and determined that taking a different approach to assessment for the spring of 2021 would allow them to better meet the needs of students in their states beyond the three options listed in the U.S. Department of Education's (ED) [February 22, 2021 letter to state chiefs](#). **The following guidance is designed to support state leaders in pursuing such strategies given the unique circumstances this year.** We do not expect state leaders to provide an answer to every question below; rather this document is intended to be used as a guide to prepare a flexibility request to ED.

## CONTEXT AND CONCERNS WITH STATEWIDE ASSESSMENT

1. What is the context of schooling in your state? To the maximum extent possible, provide a description of the proportion of schools and students engaged in remote, hybrid, and in-person instruction currently and in general over the school year. Describe any other unique circumstances impacting the delivery of education to students in your state that may be applicable.
2. Describe your understanding of the willingness of your district leaders to bring students into a school setting for the sole purpose of testing. In other words, if there are schools that are still in a full remote instructional mode, would they be willing to require students to come into school buildings to test and/or would the families in the community be willing to send students into schools to take a test?
3. How does the context of these first two questions influence your decision to request a waiver from normal statewide assessment this year? For example, given the proportion of remote and hybrid students and the decision not to remotely administer summative assessments, we are concerned that if we expected students to come into schools for testing, we would test only a small proportion of our students. States should

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enumerate its concerns with state test data this year in terms of the shortcomings (e.g., extremely low participation rates particularly for important student groups, massive context effects, and too late to inform interventions).

## EDUCATION CHALLENGES AND POTENTIAL INTERVENTIONS

4. What do you perceive as the major educational challenges the students and educators in your state face, especially this year? Note: most are aware of the general problems facing students and educators this year, so it will help to provide your state's specific context on these problems/issues. (Example: ED knows that most schools have done a fair amount of remote learning this year. An example to include would be if your state still has a majority of students in a remote learning environment into this spring testing season.)
  - a. How do you know about these challenges? Is it based on anecdotal or news reports or are you able to draw on any systematic data? If so, briefly describe the data/evidence you are using to characterize these problems and issues.
  - b. To what extent do you believe these challenges are systematic versus those that impact students or communities unevenly? For example, if some communities have limited access to remote learning resources compared to others, linking this challenge to your flexibility request is important.

## ASSESSMENT AND DATA COLLECTION

**Note:** If you are requesting flexibility from state summative assessments it will be critical to describe what data you *will* have to guide your LEAs through this season.

5. What data do you need to help in planning your interventions and/or do your LEAs need to help plan their local interventions to accelerate students' learning?
  - a. When do you need these data?
  - b. Where will these data come from?
  - c. At what level do you need data? Individual student? Classroom? Grade? School? Student group? District? Make sure the level of the data matches the level of intervention. In other words, if you are planning whole school interventions, you likely do not need student-level data.
6. Describe the data you will collect to understand student learning at or near the end of the 2020-2021 school year? Consider the following options:
  - a. Opportunity-to-learn data (see e.g. [Marion, 2020](#))—provide a detailed description of the types of data and how these data will be collected
  - b. State-provided interim/benchmark assessments
  - c. Locally-selected interim/benchmark assessments
  - d. Student grades
  - e. Teacher surveys of student performance
7. Describe *when* LEAs, parents, and the community have access to the information from these data sources.

8. How will you ensure that students with disabilities and English learners are fairly represented in your data collection approaches, especially students with significant cognitive disabilities?
  - a. Will you offer your alternate assessment even if you propose waiving your general achievement tests? How will you provide real opportunities for any student/parent who wants access to an alternate assessment?
  - b. How will you ensure that any student who needs accommodations, especially low-incidence accommodations such as Braille, is able to access these accommodations?
  - c. How are you providing opportunities to assess students' English language acquisition and growth?

## REPORTING

9. What are your plans for ensuring that parents receive information about their students' progress during this year? This information could come from data and reports from any of the previously mentioned assessments or tools.
10. Describe how available data will be reported such that stakeholders understand statewide student performance in 2021. For example, will the state provide guidance for what uses and interpretations are supported? If you plan to rely on locally-selected interim assessments, describe how you plan report the results from different assessments in a way that presents as defensible of a picture of student achievement as possible. For example, will you create a method to connect scores from the locally-selected interim assessments to your summative assessment scale? Will you use a different metric to summarize results for your entire state?

Again, state leaders do not need to address every question or criterion listed above. Rather, they should use this guidance to tailor their request to ED in ways that best address the particular context and conditions in their state.