

February 12, 2021

Dr. Miguel Cardona
U.S. Secretary of Education, Nominee

Dear Dr. Cardona,

We applaud you on your nomination to serve our country's students and families as the U.S. Secretary of Education. Your leadership is critical at a time when our nation continues to face multiple crises. We look forward to working with you and your team to rebuild and redesign our nation's education systems so that all students, but especially students of color, students from low-income communities, students with disabilities, immigrant students, English language learners, and students of other historically marginalized identities, will receive a high-quality education and be supported to fully thrive.

On February 3, you received a letter from 19 civil rights and educational equity advocacy organizations in which **they urged you to refrain from issuing waivers that would allow states to abandon statewide summative assessments for the 2020-2021 school year.**

We write in support of that position.

In typical years, statewide assessments produce data that is comparable across schools and districts within a state, allowing education leaders and decision makers to annually identify what schools and students need additional supports, where systems continue to struggle to meet the learning needs of students, and where interventions are working most effectively to improve student academic growth and outcomes. This information has allowed for state and district leaders to make decisions that are based in data. This year, while untypical in so many dimensions, education leaders should have more insight, not less, into how the pandemic has affected all students over the last two years. These data will also be key to designing interventions for schools and systems to recover from the pandemic and are **crucial to better understand how students of color, students with disabilities, students learning English, and students from low-income families have been impacted by the pandemic.**

If the Department waives the requirements for statewide summative assessments this year, education decision makers will not have had comparable insight into student performance for a second year in a row. In fact, if waivers are granted, new statewide data on student performance data will not be available until the second half of 2022. This means that **third-grade students who were assessed in 2019 - the last year for statewide assessments before the pandemic - will not be assessed again until 2022, the end of their sixth grade year.** Instead, if states administer assessments this year, they can gather data that will allow them to target resources to the students and schools that need them most.

We recognize the immense challenges that states continue to face in light of the pandemic. This may mean that states require flexibilities to administer assessments this year, such as longer testing windows, fewer assessment items, or different assessment modalities including online options. We also recognize

that states may need flexibilities with regard to accountability this year, such as the flexibilities laid out in the Department’s November 2020 guidance, and we believe there is an important opportunity to work together to build improved systems of assessment in the longer term. But these issues should not be conflated with or undercut the need to implement and report statewide assessment data this year. **The Department is well-suited to support states in assessing students this year by providing clear guidance, technical assistance, and other support - all which can be done in the absence of waivers for statewide assessments.**

You have made it clear that addressing the many inequities that exist in our education systems is one of your top priorities. We appreciate this commitment and look forward to working with you on it. One step you can take to begin remedying those inequities is to ensure that we have the data necessary to identify where our greatest challenges exist, where they persist, and where they may be growing so that we can provide additional and more targeted support for student success.

Sincerely,

Aligned
America Succeeds
Arkansas Learns
Business Roundtable
Educators For Excellence
EdAllies Minnesota
EdVoice
ExcelinEd
GeorgiaCAN
Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education
Great MN Schools
Great Leaders Strong Schools
Harold K.L. Castle Foundation
HawaiiKidsCAN
Illinois Network of Charter Schools
JerseyCAN
Learning Heroes
Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education
Minnesota Business Partnership
Minnesota Chamber of Commerce
National Association of Charter School Authorizers
National Council on Teacher Quality
National Parents Union
NewMexicoKidsCAN
Parent Revolution
Results for America

Teach Plus Texas
Tennesseans for Student Success
Thomas B. Fordham Institute
TNTP
U.S. Chamber of Commerce
Washington Roundtable/Partnership for Learning