



March 12, 2021

The Honorable Miguel Cardona
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Ave SW
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Secretary Cardona,

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic continues to harm millions of American families, and it also creates an extremely difficult situation for K–12 schools, educators, and students everywhere. Prioritizing vaccine production and distribution, championing emergency relief funding for schools, and other improved elements of the more comprehensive national response have been greatly welcomed by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) and our members. Still, on behalf of middle level and high school principals across the country, we implore you to reconsider the February 22 announcement from ED requiring states to conduct annual assessments and instead provide a blanket federal waiver for 2020–21 standardized testing required under the Every School Succeeds Act. Suspending testing requirements will afford greatly needed relief to educators and students and allow school leaders the opportunity to expend our precious time and resources on focused efforts to help our communities heal from this devastating pandemic.

Relief from this year's testing requirement is needed immediately for several important reasons. First, continuing testing will heighten inequity in education that has existed for years before the pandemic. As you know, students who attend our most under-resourced schools traditionally score lower on standardized tests, and they are the same students who have been hit hardest by COVID-19 in their homes and communities. Our limited resources would be better served providing them with the physical and wellness supports they need to perform well academically instead of taking away valuable learning and support time to test them. Teachers have assessed their students' learning needs through multiple measures of achievement throughout the school year, and they know best what their students need to overcome the challenges exacerbated by the pandemic.

Second, we have heard loudly and clearly from NASSP members that in-person testing will require burdensome, time-consuming, and potentially hazardous scheduling decisions that will have an adverse impact on teaching and learning. In addition to being unsafe in many places where the virus is still spreading rapidly, creating staggered testing schedules to comply with CDC social distancing recommendations will further limit the number of students and staff who can participate in much needed in-person learning. We have heard from many principals who are poised to lose two to three weeks or more of instructional time just so they can have students complete testing for all grade levels under these circumstances. We must ask ourselves in this moment, is this really in the best interests of our students? Or would that time be better spent providing as much instruction and support as we possibly can when they have already lost so much?



Lastly, the instability created by the pandemic will undoubtedly cause any testing conducted to yield inaccurate or unreliable data. Coupled with the general trauma inflicted by the pandemic that is sure to negatively impact test scores, students have been forced to learn under ever-changing and difficult situations. As you are aware, educators have made heroic efforts to reprioritize academic goals and provide personalized instruction whether they were virtual, hybrid, or in person. It is impossible to compare students' scores across districts via uniform testing when the type of education they have received over the past year has varied so greatly, and it would be unfair to compare their scores to previous years when their learning was so different. Many families will also choose to opt their students out of testing, skewing this data even further. For those reasons, we have grave concerns about the validity of any data collected from standardized testing and the legitimacy of any conclusions that could be ascertained from it.

We must respectfully ask, once again, that you reconsider ED's previous decision to proceed with requiring standardized testing this spring and instead provide relief for our students and educators. We know that everyone involved with this decision only wants what is best for our children. It is in the interests of those who we collectively serve that we make this request. Let us spend our precious time providing the best possible education for our students during the remainder of the school year and not allow the tragic hardship of COVID-19 to steal more from them than it already has.

Sincerely,

Ronn Nozoe
CEO, NASSP