ADVOCACY ALERT

FEBRUARY 1, 2021

Advocacy involves bringing to the attention to those who are in roles that can influence change, the facts and beliefs that I have so that their decisions reflect the topic or people for whom I am advocating.

1. **The Issue:** As a part of the federal assessment and accountability requirements outlined in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), each State Education Agency (SEA) must have an assessment plan that requires Local Education Agencies (LEAs) to administer to its students an annual standardized assessment. In Pennsylvania, PDE requires all public school entities (school districts, AVTS, and charter schools) to administer the PSSA to students in grades 3-8 and the Keystone Exams to students completing Algebra I, Biology, and English Literature. On March 27, 2020, the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) approved Pennsylvania's request to waive federal assessment requirements for the 2019-20 school year, along with accountability and certain reporting requirements based on data derived from the 2019-20 school year.

   As of the issuance of this alert, there is no defined plan for USDE to issue waivers of these assessments for the 2020-2021 school year, despite the fact that a vast majority of our LEAs are in some type of hybrid or remote instruction model. The logistics of issuing PSSAs and Keystones this spring, coupled with the concerns of the negative effect these standardized tests will have on instruction and student well-being, has prompted us to demand that USDE issue waivers again this year. However, some lawmakers believe that these assessments will provide a clearer picture of student need and learning loss. The Pennsylvania Principals Association believes that standardized tests are NOT the means for gauging this and will cause more harm than good.

2. **Bringing it to the attention to those who are in roles that can influence change:** This is a rare occasion when we need to call upon our federal legislators to influence change. U.S. Senators Casey and Toomey will have influence on this decision, but members of the U.S. Congress may also have influence. We are asking that you target YOUR Congress member, as well as both Senators in your advocacy. We recommend a letter, email, or phone call to their offices. You can use this link to find your representative to Congress; **Map of Pennsylvania US Congressional Districts - February 2021 (zipdatamaps.com)**

   You can find addresses, phone numbers, and member websites on this spreadsheet.

3. **Conveying the facts and beliefs that I have so that their decisions reflect the topic or people for whom I am advocating: The PA Principals Association joined other Pennsylvania Education Organizations in issuing a letter to the Biden Administration and Senators Toomey and Casey found at this link.** This provides a great deal of information for you to use in your advocacy communications.

   While personalized phone calls, emails and letters are always best, you can use this text to formulate your communication:

I am writing to respectfully request your assistance in ensuring the United States Department of Education offer states an assessment waiver for the 2020-2021 school year.

*As a **[principal, supervisor, educator]**, I am concerned about the amount of standardized testing our students are forced to prepare for and participate in during a normal school year. But the 2020-2021 school year has been anything but normal. Educators are navigating an unprecedented health crisis, different modes of instruction and a growing number of vulnerable students and families, all the while trying to keep themselves and their own families safe and healthy. We can't pretend like this school year is normal and we shouldn't put pressure on states, educators, and students to administer or participate in federally required standardized testing when the results won't be valid or reliable.*

[Add information specific to your experience, school, district, etc. Include your school's name, specific data, facts, or other relevant information].

States need flexibility to do what is right for their students this year through a federal assessment waiver. Standardized testing is the last thing students, parents and educators should be worried about at this moment. In a year where the mental health of our students is being jeopardized on a daily basis, we must seek ways to alleviate, not exacerbate, the issue. Additionally, with a push to schools reopen for in-person instruction coinciding with the federally required standardized testing window in April, can you imagine if Pennsylvania's schools reopen and students have to transition from virtual and hybrid instruction modes into test preparation or the standardized tests themselves?

There's no way to control for a pandemic and its corresponding impact on our schools and students, but we can do our best to use the limited time we have with our students to help them learn and grow, rather than to prepare them for a high stakes test with unreliable results. Please urge the Biden Administration and Secretary-Nominee Dr. Miguel Cardona to offer states the flexibility to do what is right for their students this year through a federal testing waiver. Thank you in advance for your consideration.