

March 1, 2021

PTA Leaders, Members and Supporters,

As you know we continue to experience an unprecedented crisis – COVID-19. This global pandemic has disrupted the public education system throughout the United States. Educators, students, and families have been forced to quickly adapt to a new normal that, in many cases, included daily virtual learning from home and new public health protocols with in-person instruction. As spring 2021 approaches, states must explore how they might safely administer statewide annual assessments for the 2020-2021 school year. The administration of these tests has been informed, in part, by guidance released by the U.S. Department of Education encouraging states to proceed with their annual assessments, while also calling for flexibility in the administration of these assessments.

To address the confusion and uncertainty aligned with assessments, your National PTA's Board of Directors called an emergency Board meeting where they approved two amendments to the 2016 position statement on assessment. These important changes were collaboratively developed by National PTA's Legislation Committee with input and insight from many volunteers. The two below amendments were added to the 2016 position statement on assessments to highlight that states should have flexibility during a national emergency or crisis in both delivery and administration of assessments to ensure that all students are assessed equitably in a safe environment. The amendments read as:

- *Assessments must accommodate the needs of all students, effectively address digital and connectivity issues to ensure equity and adhere to the most recent federal health and safety guidelines.*
- *In the event of a national emergency or crisis that disrupts the public education system, local, state, and federal authorities should allow for flexibility in the delivery and administration of assessments.*

National PTA believes that in order to understand the impact that COVID-19 has had on learning and to identify what resources and supports students need, summative assessments remain a critical tool. Additionally, parents must have information on how their children are doing. We believe that the 2016 position statement on assessments, as amended in 2021 offers the field guidance and flexibility to advocate equitably for all students.

On February 22, 2021, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) [informed state education leaders](#) that, although they would not allow waivers of summative assessments, they would allow states to apply for flexibility around accountability and school identification as well as the administration of statewide assessment. The flexibility from ED on administration on statewide assessments includes offering a shorted version of the assessment, offering remote assessments

and extending the testing window to include extending the testing window into the summer of or the beginning of the 2021-2022 school year. The February 22, 2021 guidance from ED aligns with the two amendments which the Board of Directors approved for addition to the 2016 position statement.

We strongly advocate for and continue to support increased inclusion of the parent voice in educational decision making at all levels. We remain committed to ensuring parents and families are at the table when policymakers are considering policies that affect students. Speaking up and taking action is a critical step to improve the overall education system and ensure every child has the opportunity to reach his/her full potential. As PTA's mission is on behalf of *all* children, and we continue to support parent's rights, it would be contrary to our mission to support or promote a strategy that does not consider the rights or consequences of that strategy for *all* children. National PTA does not believe that blanket waivers are an effective strategy to address the frustration over testing. Instead, National PTA advocates for summative assessments with flexibilities in both delivery and administration of assessments to ensure that all students are assessed equitably in a safe environment during a national emergency or crisis. Summative assessments remain critical ensuring the goals of educational equity and individual student achievement are realized.

When used appropriately, assessments provide much-needed information that is used to guide instruction to better meet the needs of students and ensure necessary resources and supports are provided to improve outcomes for all children. Having annual data remains critical to provide families, particularly during the 2020-2021 school year, information about how their student is performing, support school improvement efforts, promote equity and make sure every student graduates ready for postsecondary education and the workforce. Without summative assessments, parents lose a tool in evaluating the progress their child is making each year, teachers lose the ability to assess and correct weak spots in their instructional plans, communities lose the knowledge of whether or not their school is meeting students' needs, and school and state leaders lose the reliable data they depend on to make critical decisions about how to better support students in the future.

National PTA's position statement acknowledges the importance of eliminating unnecessary, low-quality assessments and not using test results as the sole factor in making educational decisions while protecting the vital role that good assessments play in measuring student progress, so parents and educators have the best information to support teaching and learning, improve outcomes and ensure equity for all children. When read in its entirety, the statement provides a holistic approach to improving assessment systems while providing necessary flexibilities during a national crisis or emergency. We continue to encourage states and districts to conduct audits of their assessment systems to ensure appropriate development, reliability and implementation of high-quality assessments. We also urge states and districts to clearly articulate to parents the assessment and accountability system in place at their child's school. Additionally, we outline the need for schools and families to engage in meaningful, two-way

communication regarding assessments, including how schools and families can work together to use the data to support student growth and learning. Further, we call for states and districts to annually evaluate and review their assessment systems to certify that they accurately and fairly measure student achievement toward college and career standards and provide valuable and timely data to parents, teachers and school leaders.

The 2020-2021 school year has presented students, families, schools and states with unique and complex challenges, but we must work together and be effective stewards of education for all of our nation's children. Together, we now have the opportunity to make certain that assessments are executed properly to ensure all students receive a high-quality education that prepares them for long-term success.

Please continue to share with us your questions, concerns, suggestions and input. We want to know your opinions, the issues that are important to you and families in your communities and the challenges you face in advocating for every child. As we have done for more than 100 years, we must continue to advocate and work together to make a difference for the education, health, safety and well-being of every child and make every child's potential a reality.

Thank you for your support and your commitment to PTA! And thank you for all that you do for our nation's children!

Sincerely,



Leslie Boggs, President
National PTA



Yvonne Johnson, VP Advocacy
National PTA