

The New Mexico Public Education Department (PED) is initiating a formal request to the U.S. Department of Education to waive federally required statewide assessment activities for the 2020-21 school year, and instead, allow PED to work with schools for an opt-in participation model. Prior to submitting a waiver, the PED seeks to gather statewide input from New Mexico stakeholders. **The purpose of this communication is to solicit your feedback on the state's plans to request a waiver for spring 2021 state summative assessments.**

## **Why Is New Mexico Seeking This Request?**

### HEALTH & SAFETY FIRST

The burdens associated with the COVID-19 pandemic have impacted New Mexico schools and families and their ability to fully participate in and benefit from a stable learning environment. Like many other states, New Mexico closed schools in spring 2020. New Mexico's high COVID rate per capita necessitated starting the 2020-21 academic year with a conservative approach that limited elementary schools to a hybrid model for reentry. However, most elementary schools remained remote. Middle and high schools have been restricted from operating in-person for the vast part of the academic year, and some districts have indicated that unless there is a significant improvement in community health status, they plan to continue remote instruction for the entirety of the academic year. As we approach the spring 2021 testing window, New Mexico finds itself in a situation parallel to spring 2020.

### VALIDITY ISSUES

Given the lack of standardized summative test administration –essentially, the inability to administer assessments uniformly given the various operating status of schools and conditions of student learning experiences and opportunities. If New Mexico were to administer spring 2021 summative assessments, the results face severe validity threats. In other words, it will be very hard to judge if any results that can be gathered will mean what users think they mean.

Additional conditions that support valid and reliable data include:

- Standardized testing environments (e.g., testing is proctored in a secure environment)
- Students have had the opportunity to learn tested skills and knowledge (e.g., sufficient coverage of academic standards during instruction).
- Accessibility and accommodations considerations for all students, including students with disabilities and English learners to be provided with supports during testing.

### FOCUSED PRIORITIES FOR REMAINDER OF THE ACADEMIC YEAR

If state health and safety guidance allow students to return to the classroom during the academic year, physical, socioemotional and academic needs will be addressed first. It is imperative that time remaining during the instructional calendar is focused on acceleration and bridging learning gaps. Students' academic and emotional needs will vary during reentry into the school setting depending on the levels of opportunity to learn. These variables will present difficulties in assessing students and render assessment results inconclusive or speculative.

---

## **How Do I Provide My Input On This Request?**

Please participate in the statewide survey for public comment at: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/ZJFVQ65>  
All public comment needs to be submitted by January 20, 2021.