

December 10, 2020

Dr. Carmen Ayala
State Superintendent of Education
Illinois State Board of Education
100 N. 1st Street
Springfield, IL 62777

Dear Dr. Ayala:

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact every corner of the state. Despite the committed efforts of educators to provide the most robust, appropriate and safe educational experience for our students, the pandemic's disruptive force has meant that students have had inconsistent and uneven experiences within schools, across districts, and among regions. Moreover, the gross inequity the pandemic has reinforced, both in health and economic outcomes, means our least resourced students feel the brunt of the pandemic's impact. Given the paucity of federal leadership and relief, coupled with rising infection rates leading to many districts' use of adaptive pauses to in-person schooling, providing a stable and consistent learning environment is impossible this school year. As such, we write today to request that you strongly advocate for a federal ESSA (Every School Succeeds Act) waiver for standardized testing for the 2020-2021 school year.

COVID rates continue to surge around the state, even before factoring in holiday travel and gatherings. It is likely that hospitals will continue to be at or near capacity, and the number of deaths will continue to be high. Increasingly large numbers of students and their families will be impacted. In this environment, rife with trauma and uncertainty, students' academic performance is a reflection of their social, emotional, and economic context, and is likely much different than it would be in a more stable and predictable schooling environment.

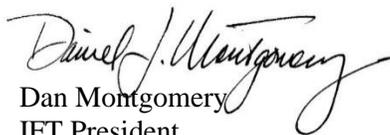
We recognize that students have learned differently this school year: they may have covered less of the traditional curriculum while learning far more about systemic inequities that go beyond the scope of traditional tests. To that end, various standardized academic tests, developed to assess particular concepts and skills during regular, sustained, in-person learning, will provide inaccurate data—these tests were simply not designed to measure student learning in a pandemic.

Further, school districts are struggling with the implications of required in-person testing. ISBE's requirement for in-person testing in 2021 will result in complicated—and potentially unsafe—logistical and scheduling decisions that will further reduce instructional time for students. The U.S. Department of Education recognizes that standardized testing this year will yield unreliable and invalid data and has postponed the National Assessment of Educational Progress (the Nation's Report Card) for this year.

Logically, then, other standardized assessments should also be postponed until conditions for learning return to a more stable state. Illinois should urge the U.S. Department of Education to waive all exams under ESSA, including but not limited to the Illinois Assessment of Readiness (IAR), the ACCESS exam, and other accountability tests.

Our primary goal is to protect the health and safety of all of our students and school communities—especially our most marginalized and vulnerable—and to prioritize learning time rather than time spent on testing. Postponing standardized testing via a U.S. DOE ESSA waiver is an important, necessary, and humanizing response to this pandemic that has ravaged our communities. We must center the health and well-being of our students, educators and school communities, and ensure that school districts are able to devote their time and resources to maximizing teaching and learning in the safest ways possible.

Sincerely,



Dan Montgomery
IFT President



A Union of Professionals



Jesse Sharkey
CTU President



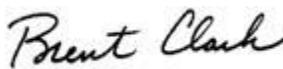
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