Georgia Department of Education

Richard Woods, Georgia's School Superintendent

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Policy, Flexibility, and External Affairs Communications Press Release

Statement from Superintendent Woods on U.S. Department of Education testing, accountability decisions

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February 24, 2021 – "On the evening of February 22, all states received information from the U.S. Department of Education (USED) regarding assessment, accountability, and reporting requirements for the 2020-21 school year (that letter is linked here).

The good news is that USED is inviting states to request a waiver, for the 2020-21 school year, of the accountability and school identification requirements in federal law. This would apply to CCRPI along with the identification of schools for state support (CSI and TSI). As soon as we receive additional information from USED, Georgia will seek all available flexibility from these requirements.

Unfortunately, there is disappointing news as well. USED has made it clear they will not waive federal testing requirements for 2020-21. This means Georgia will have to proceed with administering the Georgia Milestones assessment this spring. I completely disagree with this decision, and believe it shows the continued disconnect between Washington, D.C. and the realities of the classroom. At this point, our focus is on ensuring this disheartening decision does not harm the health and safety of any Georgia student.

USED's letter mentions remote administration of state tests. We have thoroughly investigated this option and it is not achievable from a logistical, connectivity, or security standpoint. We are unaware of any states that have accomplished remote administration of a secure standardized test on this scale without major issues.

However, USED also specifically states in their letter that "certainly, we do not believe that if there are places where students are unable to attend school safely in person because of the pandemic that they should be brought into school buildings for the sole purpose of taking a test." Additionally, the federal requirement that 95% of students participate in assessments will be waivable according to USED's letter.

Georgia has already worked to reduce the high-stakes nature of testing this year. The State Board of Education approved my recommendation to reduce the weight of Georgia Milestones EOCs to 0.01% of students' final grades, and I directed school districts with flexibility contracts to use input from teachers and parents, placement committees, class performance, and formative tools instead of Georgia Milestones to make student promotion/retention decisions. We have also waived the summative TKES evaluation for 2020-21 – meaning teachers will still receive observations but will not receive an end-of-year, scored evaluation.

With these changes in place to remove student and teacher consequences, the federal removal of the 95% participation requirement, and the clear direction of USED that students should not be brought into school buildings for the purpose of taking a test, **I have communicated to Georgia school districts that they <u>should not</u> require virtual**

students to come into the building solely for the purpose of taking Georgia Milestones, and should ensure that parents understand this option is available to them.

I appreciate the flexibility offered by USED around accountability and school identification. I am disappointed by their approach to testing, and I continue to believe that high-stakes standardized tests in the middle of a pandemic are not necessary, wise, or useful. At this point, we are working to ensure maximum flexibility around testing and to ensure the health and safety of every Georgia student."

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