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For Immediate Release
Friday, February 5, 2021

UPDATE ON SEEKING FEDERAL WAIVER OF ASSESSMENTS

Dear Colleagues:

Over the past several months, the members of the Board and I have been deeply engaged in dialogue about spring assessments. We have closely monitored the status of district learning models and your concerns about the social and emotional wellbeing of our students, as the pandemic has stretched on for longer than a year. While 77 percent of school districts are offering some in-person instruction, our data tell us that more than a million students are still learning completely remotely. Fewer than 200 districts serving less than 200,000 students are currently able to provide fully in-person instruction.

Given where we are, we believe it is more important to focus on supporting our students' transition back to in-person learning, than to focus on assessments. Our focus belongs on building our students' reconnection with their teachers and re-engagement in learning in the classroom. That's why we will advocate for the U.S. Department of Education to make waivers available for spring 2021 assessments. If a waiver is made available, Illinois will apply for it.

Assessment – the practice of collecting evidence about student learning to provide them with feedback and inform instructional design – is still critically important to helping students recover from the pandemic; this practice can and should happen this spring at the classroom and district levels.

It has been a collaborative process to come to this decision. We have listened and given great consideration to every perspective that has been shared with us. Thank you for your passion and your partnership on behalf of Illinois' students. Together, we will overcome this pandemic.

Sincerely,

Dr. Carmen I. Ayala
State Superintendent of Education
Illinois State Board of Education

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