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North Carolina Department of PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

NC DPI

State Board of Education Seeks Federal Testing Waiver

Raleigh, NC

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The North Carolina State Board of Education voted unanimously today to seek a one-year waiver from the U.S. Department of Education for federal student testing and accountability requirements for the 2019-20 school year because of school closures ordered to combat COVID-19.

Under the federal Every Student Succeeds Act, all states are required to test students annually as an accountability measure of student and school performance.

U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos announced Friday that students impacted by school closures due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic can bypass standardized testing for the 2019-20 school year. The Department of Education said Friday it will grant a waiver to any state that is unable to assess its students due to the ongoing national emergency, providing relief from federally mandated testing requirements for this school year.

“Students need to be focused on staying healthy and continuing to learn,” DeVos said in a news release. “Teachers need to be able to focus on remote learning and other adaptations. Neither students nor teachers need to be focused on high-stakes tests during this difficult time. Students are simply too unlikely to be able to perform their best in this environment.”

Tammy Howard, director of Accountability Services for the N.C. Department of Public Instruction, told State Board members that the U.S. Department of Education has said that it will process waiver requests within one business day if submitted on their own request template, as DPI is doing under today’s board action.

Howard said that the waiver is needed because of the disruptions resulting from the current national health emergency.

“All assessments must be administered under conditions that ensure that these data are valid and reliable,” Howard said, “and we cannot do that at this time.”

The North Carolina tests that would be waived include end-of-grade tests in reading and math in grades 3 through 8, science tests in grades 5 and 8 and end-of-course tests in Math 1 and 3, biology and English 2. The waiver would also include the state’s A-F school performance grades as well as a number of elements included in the state’s School Report Cards.

In response to a question raised by board member Olivia Oxendine about a waiver from accountability requirements set by the General Assembly, JB Buxton, the chairman of the board’s Student Learning and Achievement Committee said conversations with legislators have started.

“[Board] Chairman Davis has already opened up some of those discussions with members of the legislature and let them know that in the wake of this submission, we’ll be coming to them with a full listing of state accountability requirements, ties to bonuses etc. that we would request waivers from them consistent with this [federal waiver],” Buxton said.

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