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North Carolina Department of PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

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State Board of Education Seeks Waiver from State Accountability Rules

Raleigh, NC

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The North Carolina State Board of Education voted today to ask the N.C. General Assembly to waive certain state accountability requirements for the current academic year because of statewide school closures ordered last month to slow the spread of COVID-19.

The board also approved a measure asking the legislature to ease licensure testing requirements for beginning teachers who are now facing a June deadline for gaining a continuing license.

The board's request for relief from state testing and accountability requirements follows its request last month to the U.S. Department of Education for a waiver from federal accountability rules. As with other states, the waiver has been approved.

Board Chairman Eric Davis emphasized that the waiver request is needed only because of the circumstances forced by the COVID-19 pandemic.

"This does not change our commitment to high standards, effect assessments to inform instruction and an accountability system that drives student achievement," Davis said.

If approved by the General Assembly, certain accountability measures would be lifted temporarily for this year. End-of-grade and end-of-course exams would not be administered nor would schools be identified according to the state's A-F grading scale. In addition, bonuses given to teachers in certain grade levels and courses would not be provided since they're keyed to results on student exam scores.

A number of other state requirements would be suspended. Without third grade end-of-grade reading tests, data would not be available to inform parents on students' progress in reading, determine students who qualify for summer reading camps, promotion, and transitional fourth grade classes, and to report student gains under the state's EVAAS system for grade three teachers. Without test data and growth data (EVAAS), there will not be data to identify qualifying schools for the Innovative School District as required in fall 2020.

For beginning and early-career teachers, today's board action gives them additional time to meet state licensing requirements. Teachers with initial licenses set to expire June 30 would be extended for one year until they pass required tests by June 30, 2021, pending legislative approval.

New teaching graduates will be able to begin teaching without having passed the required exams, although education preparation programs have the option to recommend against licensure for candidates. And with approval by the legislature, the 16-week requirement for student teaching would be suspended for those students who had started that work before March 16.

The board also approved a step to hold districts harmless from possible reductions in transportation funding for 2020-21 school year because of unexpected impacts from the COVID-19 closure. The board directed the Department of Public Instruction to develop a funding formula so that at a minimum, school districts will not face any reduction in their funding formula transportation allotment compared to 2019-2020 levels.

The board also praised the efforts of school nutrition personnel and others who are working in districts across the state to ensure that children have been receiving meals during the school closure. Vice Chairman Alan Duncan said the board recognizes the stress that district staff are facing and that it is considering ways that it can provide additional support to them.

On another COVID-19-related issue, the board approved a contract extension for the Istation reading diagnostic tool to allow districts and schools to be able to access prior assessment results through June 30.

The $243,000 contract amendment responds to present and evolving circumstances concerning the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic while maintaining Istation's relationship with the state and its and school districts.

The new amendment with Istation ensures that the data already generated this school year will remain intact and maintained. No Istation data will be gathered at the state-level over the next three months, but local districts and schools are free to engage Istation individually if they wish to have continued access to formative assessments for administration at home. Teachers, parents and students will continue to have uninterrupted login access to Istation, including its adaptive curriculum in reading, math and Spanish, throughout the duration of the school year, though certain adaptive features may be affected by local decision-making with respect to the formative assessments.

A statement from Chairman Davis about the Istation contract amendment is available here (https://drive.google.com/file/d/1eqCJDi3Kv_MZsQAcKpZtMIsWKR_qHkRx/view) .

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