



**COLORADO**  
**Department of Education**  
Commissioner of Education

201 East Colfax Avenue  
Denver, CO 80203-1799

Feb. 23, 2021

Dear Superintendents and BOCES Executive Directors,

I hope you are all doing okay—I know you are all tired and hitting a COVID-19 wall. Thank you for your resilience and tireless efforts over this past year. I have been thinking about you all. I haven't reached out personally to you very much lately because our CDE Updates are serving as our primary vehicle for communicating important information to you. But I wanted to connect with you myself about the recent news affecting the 2021 administration of our CMAS assessments. I know you all are very passionate about this issue.

As you are most likely aware, [HB21-1125](#) was introduced in the state legislature on Friday, Feb. 19, calling for a suspension of CMAS and its associated CoAlt assessments if allowed by federal law or by a waiver of federal law. It directs CDE to apply for a waiver from corresponding federal law requirements. This bill does not address PSAT/SAT or their corresponding CoAlt assessments.

This bill is still in the early stages of consideration during the legislative process.

Meanwhile, yesterday, the [U.S. Department of Education \(USDE\) yesterday provided an update on assessment, accountability, and reporting requirements for the 2020-2021 school year.](#)

I know that this is not the news many of you were hoping for, but the USDE is not inviting “blanket” assessment waivers. The federal government indicated a willingness to work with states to address individual needs and conditions while “ensuring the maximum available statewide data to inform the targeting of resources and supports.” Flexibility options were again shared regarding shortened tests, remote administration, and lengthening of the testing window, potentially even into the fall.

CDE explored shortening CMAS and administering the assessments remotely with both state and national technical advisors and its vendors. These possibilities also were raised by Colorado's COVID-19 Policy Implications Stakeholder Group last fall. Neither were determined to be feasible for Colorado.

Taking into consideration district closing dates for the 2020-21 school year, CDE has already extended the testing window through May 14. While extending the window into summer or fall poses a number of challenges and burdens for students, parents, and educators and creates technical and logistical issues, we will work with your district assessment coordinators if more time for testing this school year would be helpful to you.

I was pleased to see that the USDE will consider waivers for federal accountability and school identification. This stance on accountability appears to be consistent with many Coloradans' perspectives, including the Stakeholder Group, educators, the State Board of Education, and the legislature.



In addition, the USDE reiterated that parents, educators and the public must have access to data on student learning, so all requirements for state and local report cards are being maintained, including those addressing disaggregation by student subgroup. Given the invited accountability waivers, reporting on accountability, including school ratings, are excluded from the requirements.

It's important for me to emphasize that testing should only occur when health and safety conditions allow. In addition, parents' decisions to excuse their children from testing must be respected. This is consistent with messaging from the USDE stating that if there are communities where students are unable to attend school safely in person because of the pandemic, they do not expect students to be brought into school buildings solely to test.

While we understand the federal department's communication is not what you may have been hoping for, we encourage you to continue to prepare for CMAS testing this spring. I do understand and empathize with the challenges assessments pose this year. At the same time, I encourage you all to make a good faith effort to administer our CMAS assessments so the results provide students, parents, teachers, districts and the state with a picture of the pandemic's impact on student learning.

CDE will continue to monitor the status of state legislation and explore the invitation to submit an accountability waiver from the federal department of education.

Now that we are a year into this pandemic that has upended our lives and brought so much loss and hardship to families and communities, I find myself doing a lot of reflecting. I feel an immense sense of gratitude for your partnership and leadership over the past year. The challenges have been relentless, but I'm so grateful for your professionalism, your dedication and your commitment to serving all students.

My best,



Katy Anthes, Ph.D.  
Commissioner

