



MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Carey M. Wright, Ed.D.
State Superintendent of Education

Date: October 8, 2018

To: District Superintendents

From: Carey M. Wright, Ed.D.

Re: Required Assessments in Mississippi's Approved ESSA Plan

The MDE has received several questions from districts after last week's release of the U.S. Department of Education's *Parents' Guide to ESSA Flexibilities*. Most questions concern the flexibility ESSA allows with assessments. To address these questions, I am providing you with a summary and rationale for the key assessment components in Mississippi's state ESSA plan, which the U.S. Department of Education approved in March.

- Mississippi will continue to use the Mississippi Academic Assessment Program (MAAP) to assess students in grades 3-8 and in high school.
- As allowed by ESSA, Mississippi chose to be consistent with current policy of banking scores of students who take Algebra I in middle school for high school accountability. This approach saved the state money by not developing another subject area test for Algebra II for those 8th graders when they are in high school.
- Tests aligned to state standards are critical for monitoring student achievement in a fair and consistent manner for all districts.
- The state did not choose to implement innovative testing for the following reasons:
 - We have confidence that our current state tests are aligned to our state standards.
 - Neither ACT or SAT is fully aligned to our state standards for learning.
 - The ESSA statute and relevant regulations stipulate that any approved innovative assessment would be subject to peer review
 - Beside cost, innovative tests must pass a stringent series of requirements to meet the approval of the U.S. Department of Education. These requirements should be considered minimum standards, meaning the state may establish additional requirements.
 - ESSA requires that the innovative assessment chosen by the state be aligned to and addresses the breadth and depth of the state's content standards; be equivalent to the statewide assessments in its content coverage, difficulty, and quality; provide valid and reliable data on student achievement for all students and subgroups as compared to the statewide assessments; meet the criteria for technical quality that all statewide assessments must meet (e.g., peer reviewed);



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and provide unbiased, rational, and consistent differentiation among schools within the state's accountability system.

As you can see, ESSA established challenging standards for any state or local education agency to take advantage of the flexibility provisions within the law. This [Council of Chief State School Officers \(CCSSO\) resource on the local assessment flexibility](#) describes many of the challenges and costs associated with this approach.

Mississippi's approved ESSA plan reflects the deep and thoughtful engagement of stakeholders across our state, and it better aligns Mississippi's education policy priorities with the federal requirements we must meet to receive federal funds.

Mississippi will continue to implement our approved ESSA plan as our stakeholders expect and we are required to do under federal law. We will continue to engage stakeholders and state policymakers as issues arise in implementation that may require adjustments in the future.