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January 29, 2021

APPOINTED MEMBERS:

Office of Elementary and Secondary Education
c/o Frank Brogan, Assistant Secretary
400 Maryland Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Assistant Secretary Brogan,

The Montana Board of Public Education supports and encourages the Montana Office of Public Instruction's pursuit of seeking maximum flexibility and options under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) reauthorized as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) with the intent to receive a second one-year waiver under Section 8401 of ESSA for provisions specific to the 2020-2021 state assessment and the accountability system.

The Board of Public Education recognizes that the primary purpose of assessment is to serve learning. A balanced assessment system provides an integrated approach to meeting both classroom learning needs and school and state level information needs—one that continuously improves teaching and learning and informs education policy. Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, serving the basic needs of our students has been challenging and requiring our schools to implement statewide testing is not the best way to measure student success at this time. We believe that the health, safety, and well-being of our communities should be the focus of our efforts for as long as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact teaching and learning in our schools. While we recognize the importance of accountability to direct federal funds that support our schools, we know that the continuing effects of the pandemic make it critical to grant these waivers for the 2020-2021 school year.

We appreciate your consideration in granting the Montana Office of Public Instruction a second one-year assessment waiver and recognizing the value this flexibility would provide to our schools, educators, families, and students.

Sincerely,

Darlene Schottle, Chair
cc: Superintendent Elsie Arntzen, Office of Public Instruction