

United States Senate

March 18, 2021

The Honorable Miguel Cardona
Secretary
U. S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Ave SW
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Secretary Cardona,

I am writing to request you grant the one year national assessment waiver requested by Montana's Office of Public Instruction submitted on February 5, 2021 in accordance with Section 8401 of ESSA. This request has the support of the Governor of Montana, Board of Public Education, and the Montana American Indian Caucus.

As you may be aware, Montana is a state that prides itself on strong local control of education, where academic decisions are made as close to the classroom as possible by parents, administrators, and teachers. Since March 2020 and the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Montana schools have been working diligently to educate our students and safely reopen. Montana's 403 school districts serve nearly 150,000 students and are operating 36% in person, 54% hybrid, and only 10% remote.

Montana is a predominantly rural state where in many places there is no cellular network service, let alone rural broadband. Despite this, Montana's educators have worked hard to keep their students engaged and on track however their schools are operating. I have heard significant concerns about the burdens that testing mandates would impose on schools, teachers, and students, particularly considering the results will not factor into the Department of Education's student performance accountability reporting. Adding another significant hurdle for them at this time is unreasonable and imprudent, especially with so little time to prepare before testing is scheduled to begin.

Due to the drastic and unprecedented challenges the pandemic has caused in education over the last twelve months and the enormous pressure it has placed on students and their teachers, it is unlikely that national testing will offer an accurate representation of achievement. Of the 13,506 school districts across the country, each has adopted varied operating plans which will distort assessment results, not to mention the unique challenges of conducting a standardized test virtually or in a hybrid model. I urge you to grant Montana's request for a national assessment waiver and provide our teachers, schools, and students the flexibility they need.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and I would appreciate your prompt consideration.

Sincerely,



STEVE DAINES
United States Senator