



# LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

**TO:** School System Superintendents

**FROM:** Dr. Cade Brumley, State Superintendent of Education

**DATE:** February 1, 2021

**SUBJECT:** State Assessments and Accountability for School Year 2020-2021

Dear Colleagues,

Without question, this is an important year to leverage every resource at our disposal to close gaps and accelerate student achievement. State assessments are a critical tool to better understand the needs of our students. Our state's robust K-12 accountability system informs and focuses educators by providing clear expectations for student outcomes. It also provides families and other community stakeholders with objective information about school quality. We recognize this has been an extraordinary year for all school systems and requires us to revisit how we traditionally understand our assessment and accountability system.

We at the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) have placed an emphasis on supporting school systems as they address unfinished learning, set the foundation for continuous learning, and prepare and implement modified operations. The LDOE has published guidance to help ensure every student has access to high-quality teaching and learning experiences. This includes Strong Start 2020, which delivered comprehensive resources and agency support to systems. We maintain our commitment to supporting school systems.

I've placed a premium on transparency since my first day serving as your state superintendent. Open communication matters, especially during these unprecedented circumstances. I want to provide you with a few important updates regarding our state's assessment and accountability system.

## **Statewide Assessments & K-12 Accountability**

Statewide standardized assessments play a vital role in ensuring every student has access to an equitable education. We must ensure all eligible students safely participate in statewide assessments to the greatest extent possible. We must know the pandemic's impact on our kids and the extent to which our educators have mitigated excessive loss for students. We have the full intention of providing assessment results to school systems in a timely manner so they can analyze student data and make informed decisions on how to best support their educators and students. Test participation remains a requirement of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

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Given the value that assessment results bring to students, teachers, families, school systems, and communities, we do not currently plan to seek a waiver from this federal requirement. Several actions have already taken place this year to provide reasonable flexibilities:

- [Act 53](#) of the 2020 Second Extraordinary Legislative Session has prohibited the use of student assessment data for the purposes of evaluating teacher performance or making placement decisions for fourth- and eighth-grade students. That same Act disallows the use of state assessments from this year for value-added data for the purposes of teacher evaluation. The LDOE will continue to provide to school systems, to the greatest extent possible, all available data in a secure manner that helps them make informed decisions around instruction, scheduling, and other critical decisions that so often rely on assessment data.
- Currently, there are safeguards in place to ensure accountability results are not unfairly attributed to schools and school systems in extraordinary circumstances. [Act 47](#) of the 2020 Second Extraordinary Legislative Session directs BESE to examine the results of assessments and to make allowances in calculating school and district performance scores as BESE may deem necessary and appropriate. In addition, the law also requires BESE to prepare a petition to the United States Department of Education (ED) for a waiver of the requirement to publish letter grades if the issuance of letter grades would be detrimental to the state of Louisiana.

## **LDOE Assessment and K-12 Accountability SY 20-21 Flexibilities**

Our agency has already started the process of responding to the unique challenges this pandemic brings. After consulting with various stakeholder groups and the public, we have initiated several actions:

- We have submitted an addendum to our state ESSA plan to ED. The ESSA addendum allows greater flexibility in how schools are identified as struggling, providing relief to school systems that may desire not to receive a label such as 'Comprehensive Intervention Required' or 'Urgent Intervention Required' based on student performance from this year.
- For the 2020-2021 school year, BESE revised Bulletin 130 to state that only one qualitative measure observation is required for those teachers and administrators who earn a Highly Effective or Effective Proficient rating. Any teacher or administrator who earns an observation rating of Ineffective or Effective: Emerging shall be observed a second time. This will allow school leaders to prioritize their time accordingly.

## **Early Childhood Accountability**

Quality early care and education is transformative for young children, their families, communities, and our state as a whole. Louisiana has been nationally recognized for its unified early childhood quality rating system. The observation data collected from CLASS observations in infant, toddler, and pre-K classrooms across the state each year are invaluable and inform our state's quality improvement efforts.

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The Department recognizes that the COVID-19 pandemic has posed incredible challenges for early childhood programs and communities, and that lead agencies and sites have experienced many obstacles while implementing the unified quality rating system this year. During the spring months, 70% of licensed child care centers were closed due to the pandemic, and due to ongoing mitigation efforts to ensure the safety of staff and children, only 1% of licensed centers are closed as of this month. In order to support early childhood lead agencies to target their efforts where it is most needed:

- BESE has approved a one-time emergency rule change to Bulletin 140 that allows classrooms that received a fall local observation score, after third party replacement, of 4.50 or higher to be exempt from a spring local observation. Lead agencies should communicate with eligible program partners and document whether these sites would like to opt in or out of receiving a spring local observation in exempt classrooms.

The Department will continue to provide guidance on early childhood accountability to lead agencies during the regularly scheduled weekly webinars. Thank you for your efforts in ensuring that, despite a global pandemic, children birth through age four continue to receive the highest quality early care and education possible.

The pandemic has presented us all with historic challenges. We must leverage every tool at our disposal to understand the pandemic's impact on our children. This allows us to identify what supports are needed so we can help our children achieve what's possible. As we have throughout this pandemic, we will continue to monitor the latest educational developments across our state and review and respond to any guidance that becomes available from the new ED administration.

I'm grateful for the work of our students, educators, families, and leaders. Even during the pandemic, we're striving to realize the full potential of all children. Together, we will continue to meet the challenge of this moment. We believe our children are our highest priority and that our future is bright.

We're here to support you through this process. Please contact [assessment@la.gov](mailto:assessment@la.gov) with assessment administration questions and [accountability@la.gov](mailto:accountability@la.gov) for accountability-related questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Cade Brumley".

Dr. Cade Brumley  
State Superintendent of Education

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