



FALL 2020 REOPENING CONSIDERATIONS SURVEY

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought unprecedented challenges into every facet of our lives. It has exposed profound inequities in our public school system and created serious, complicated problems for our students, educators, and communities to navigate. While it has been our hope that school buildings could open in a few short weeks, it has become abundantly clear that we are in no position to proceed as planned. We cannot, and should not, rush back into buildings simply to comply with the current calendared start date when students' and educators' health and safety are at risk.

Educators are fearful for our health and the health of our students. We are worried about our families and our students' families. With the number of COVID cases growing daily, the absence of leadership from our state's top education officials has been disheartening to say the least. We are in the midst of a statewide crisis, and while we would typically defer to a school district knowing their communities' specific needs better than anyone, this is markedly different. It is now time for the Department of Education to step in and provide meaningful, standardized guidance.

As we look to health care professionals for guidance on *when* it is safe to return to our buildings, it is imperative that the state takes its cues on *how* we return to school by listening to the people who know our schools best: educators.

To that end, we asked Mississippi educators to take a survey to provide critically-needed input as COVID cases continue to rise and we barrel toward the start of the 2020-2021 academic year.

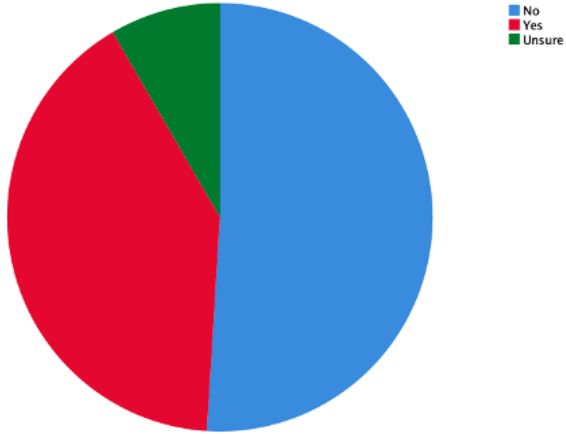
Nearly 2,400 educators representing all 82 counties in the state responded to our request. They are a cross section of the thousands of educators in Mississippi's public school system: teacher assistants, certified teachers, school administrators, and district administrators are all represented.

This feedback—honest and, in some instances, difficult to read—must be taken seriously as state leaders make decisions about schools reopening. We must heed these educators' warnings and take their concerns seriously. Their unmatched understanding of the challenges we face inside school buildings is invaluable and ignoring it needlessly jeopardizes the health of Mississippi's students and educators.

Or, as one Jackson County educator said more plainly: "It is too dangerous for both the teachers and students. Teachers should not have to risk their lives to teach."

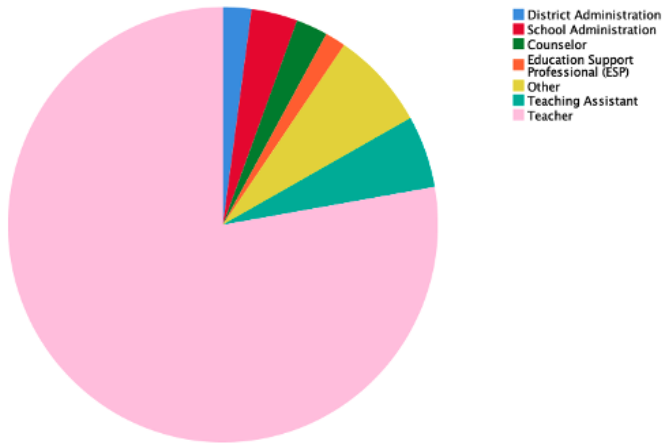
PART I: Respondent Snapshot

Q: ARE YOU A MEMBER OF THE MISSISSIPPI ASSOCIATION OF EDUCATORS (MAE)?



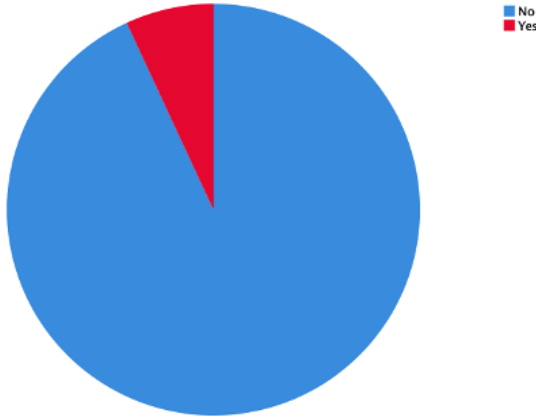
Member	Number	%
No	1219	51
Yes	971	40.6
Unsure	201	8.4
TOTAL	2391	100

Q: WHAT IS YOUR ANTICIPATED ROLE FOR THE 2020-2021 SCHOOL YEAR?



Respondent Role	Number	%
District Administration	51	2.1
School Administration	83	3.5
Counselor	57	2.4
Education Support Professional (ESP)	37	1.5
Other	175	7.3
Teaching Assistant	128	5.4
Teacher	1860	77.8
TOTAL	2391	100

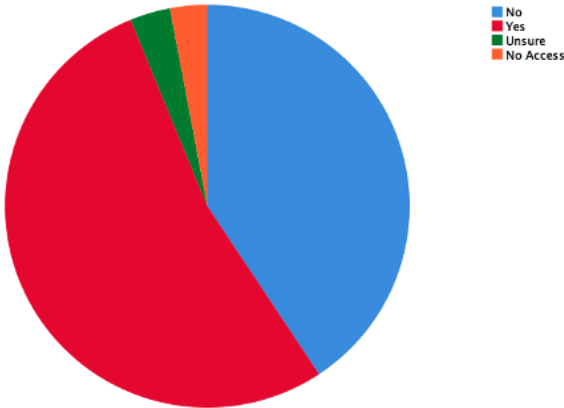
Q: ARE YOU A NEW HIRE FOR THE SCHOOL DISTRICT YOU WILL BE WORKING FOR DURING THE 2020-2021 SCHOOL YEAR?



New Hire?	Number	%
No	2226	93.1
Yes	165	6.9
TOTAL	2391	100

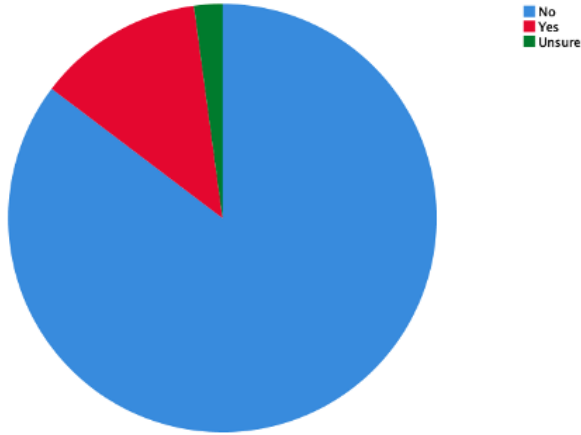
Part II: Communication

Q: HAVE YOU BEEN CONTACTED VIA YOUR SCHOOL/WORK EMAIL ADDRESS ABOUT YOUR SCHOOL DISTRICT'S/SCHOOL'S PLAN TO REOPEN FOR THE 2020-2021 SCHOOL YEAR?



School Email Contact	Number	%
No	973	40.7
Yes	1270	53.1
Unsure	77	3.2
No access	71	3
TOTAL	2391	100

Q: HAVE YOU BEEN CONTACTED VIA YOUR PERSONAL EMAIL ABOUT YOUR SCHOOL DISTRICT’S/SCHOOL’S PLAN TO REOPEN FOR THE 2020-2021 SCHOOL YEAR?

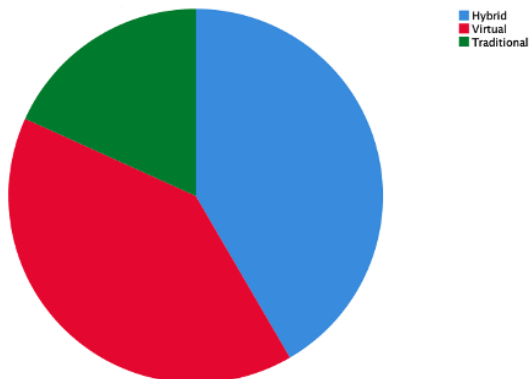


Personal email contact	Number	%
No	2040	85.3
Yes	300	12.5
Unsure	51	2.1
TOTAL	2391	100

Since school buildings closed in Spring 2020, educators have voiced their frustration with communication coming from the state and district levels. With less than a month until educators were expected to return to their buildings, nearly 41% of respondents had not yet heard from their district or their school regarding reopening plans on their school-issued email account. As we continue to navigate this challenging new environment it is imperative that district and state leadership prioritize communication with educators.

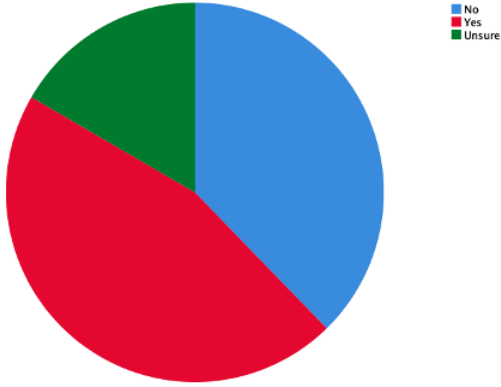
PART III: School Reopening | Preferences, Professional Development, and Desired Resources

Q: VIEW THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENT TO ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTION [Survey links to Mississippi Department of Education’s reopening options, “Mississippi Schools: Guidance for 2020-21 School Year”] | WHICH OF THE SCHOOL REOPENING MODELS WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE IMPLEMENTED IN YOUR SCHOOL DISTRICT?



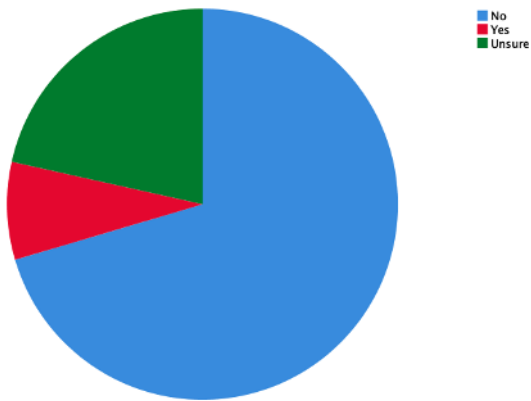
Preferred learning model	Number	%
Hybrid	995	41.6
Virtual	960	40.2
Traditional	436	18.2
TOTAL	2391	100

Q: HAS YOUR SCHOOL/DISTRICT OFFERED ONLINE TEACHING AND LEARNING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (PD)/TRAINING DURING THE SUMMER?



Online instruction PD	Number	%
No	900	37.7
Yes	1089	45.6
Unsure	397	16.6
TOTAL	2386	100

Q: HAS YOUR SCHOOL/DISTRICT OFFERED SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (PD)/TRAINING DURING THE SUMMER TO ADDRESS EFFECTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON STUDENTS?



Social/emotional health PD	Number	%
No	1676	70.4
Yes	192	8.1
Unsure	512	21.5
TOTAL	2380	100

Q: WHAT SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL HEALTH RESOURCES WOULD YOU BE INTERESTED IN RECEIVING TO HELP ADDRESS EFFECTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON STUDENTS?

School social workers

Financial resources

Counselor support

Age-appropriate mental health literature

- Pamphlets
- Second step books
- Videos

Mental health professional development

- How to get students to communicate their feelings/perception
- How to properly assess mental health

Protocols for virtual check-in with students

Access to on-site and virtual counselors/counseling for teachers

- Grief counseling
- Readjustment counseling
- Mental health testing
- Group counseling

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- Grief counseling
- Readjustment counseling
- Mental health testing
- Group Counseling

Yoga

Breathing exercises

Access to current research

Prayer

Q: WHAT OTHER RESOURCES WILL YOU NEED TO ADEQUATELY ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF STUDENTS AS THEY ADJUST TO THEIR NEW LEARNING ENVIRONMENT?

*RESPONSES: 1080 (OPTIONAL QUESTION; 45.17% response rate. Responses in **bold** indicate most frequently requested resources.*

Respondents are interested in receiving the following resources:

Technology for students

- Respondents are concerned about technology use in the classroom.
 - On-on-one tablets/laptops for "no sharing " use would be helpful.
 - Internet access for rural areas and/or hotspots
 - Appropriate furniture for tech use

Technology for teachers

- Laptops, tablets
- Document cameras
- Microphones
- Headphones
- Speakers

Internet access for students

- Respondents remarked on the limitations of online learning in rural and impoverished communities and expressed general concerns related to education inequity. Access could be limited due to infrastructure or having the financial means to obtain internet access.
 - "Internet access in the homes of our students. The majority of ours can't get it in their rural areas regardless of if they can afford it or not."

Internet Access for teachers

- Teachers who live in rural areas may not have access to reliable internet service.

PPE, most notably masks or face shields/coverings

- Daily supply of masks for students and teachers
- Respondents are concerned about spending their own money
- Thermometers
- Plexiglas dividers

Furniture compliant with CDC guidelines

Continuous contact with health care professionals

- Some respondents are interested in regularly hearing from community health care professionals
- On-site nurses for all buildings

Equitable resources

Counseling for educators

Counseling for students

- Respondents are interested in securing counseling services to help students understand their “new normal.” Respondents are open to both on-site sessions and virtual sessions for students.

Resources for parents

- Training on virtual/distance/online learning and technology
 - Google Classroom
 - Online Gradebooks
 - Canvas

Community resources

- Food banks
- Wi-Fi hotspots/internet access points
- Jobs

School-parent engagement resources

Training on virtual/distance/online learning for teachers

- Google Classroom
- Schoology
- Teachers would like an online platform that is easy to navigate
- Canvas
- Algebra Nation

District and school support in the form of:

- Smaller class sizes
- **Funding for PPE**
 - *Respondents are concerned about spending their own money and being able to locate enough PPE for themselves and their students*

Standardized parent contact related to COVID-19

SPED resources

Moral support

COVID-related discipline procedures

- How do respond to students and/or parents not following CDC and/or school board regulations

Access to classroom as additional workspace in the event of distance/online learning

- EXAMPLE: Coughing on another student

Personal copies of books/textbooks for students

Additional faculty and staff

- Tutors
- Nurses
- Counselors

Curriculum resources

- **SPED, Inclusion in the online environment**
- Online assessment protocols
- Resources to address potential learning loss/gaps
- Science labs

Social/emotional awareness training for teachers

Student appropriate/age-appropriate COVID literature

Regular/daily COVID testing

- On-site

Morale resources

Current pedagogical research

Openly communicated emergency plans

Adjusted grading system

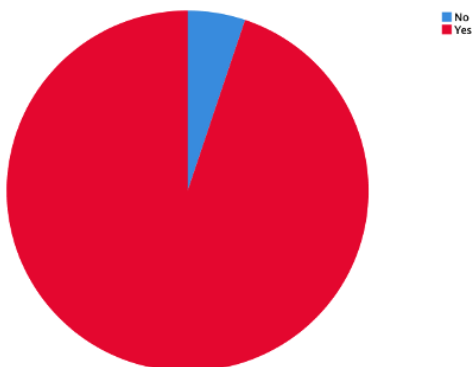
Adjusted leave policies

Building renovations/improved infrastructure

- Air filtration
- Clean water

Statewide support from the Mississippi Department of Education

Q: IN LIGHT OF THE CONTINUED EFFECTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, DO YOU THINK STATE TESTING SHOULD BE SUSPENDED FOR THE 2020-2021 SCHOOL YEAR?



State Testing (2020-2021)	Number	%
No	123	5.1
Yes	2268	94.9
TOTAL	2391	100

Nearly 95% of educators agree that the suspension of state-issued standardized testing is warranted for the 2020-2021 academic year. After enduring an unsettled spring and summer and facing the possibility of even more disruptions to their lives inside and outside the classroom, students and educators should be focused on remediation and mental health upon returning to school. This is no time to put unnecessary stressors on our kids and their teachers.

PART IV: Sentiment Analysis

Q: WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON REOPENING SCHOOLS THIS FALL?

This open-ended question gave respondents an opportunity to share their support for or concerns related to schools reopening in August.

When asked about reopening schools, **86.3% of respondents expressed a negative sentiment about a traditional return to school buildings**, advocating for schools to reopen at a later date and/or to reopen utilizing virtual learning. Respondents expressed feelings of unease and tension about a return to the classroom and, in the case of virtual learning, concerns about their ability to keep up with the demands of a new work environment. Respondents also cited their own medical histories, including pre-existing conditions such as diabetes and high blood pressure, the health of their family, and the health of students as primary concerns.

6.9% of respondents advocated for reopening schools without modifications to the traditional school model, citing students’ mental health and security as a concern. Respondents also cited a need for “normalcy.”

6.8% of respondents advocated for reopening schools but with modifications to the school day and included mask mandates, social distancing guidelines, and/or adjusted school times in their comments.

Reopening reactions	Number	%
Negative	1820	86.3
Positive w/ no reservations	146	6.9
Positive w/ reservations	144	6.8
Total	2110	100
No response	281	
TOTAL	2391	

Sample Feedback on Reopening | Fears, Concerns, and Desired Resources

“A uniform learning system that can be incorporated and is easily navigated on all levels and is manageable for students, parents, teachers, administration, support staff, etc.”

“Administrators need to be consulting health care professionals. Administrators do not have knowledge in regard to health issues. Putting alcohol free sanitizers up all over schools does not help. Alcohol based sanitizers are recommended by CDC. What a waste of money!!!”

“Please don’t ask me to spend any more of my own money on supplies. Supply the ppe and the hand sanitizer. Give us our own testing supplies and our own onsite lab!”

“Research to support what we’re about do will be beneficial for students. I’m having a hard time understanding how being in a classroom with no movement for students will help them.”

One on one therapy for each kid. Truthfully, most of the kids in my district need this to begin with. The number of children in my school who have witnessed SERIOUS violence is incredibly high, and most of them are enduring the trauma of poverty.

“Technology and internet for all. Our area is too rural.”

“PTSD training because we are putting students at risk of developing ptsd.”

“I teach severe/profound special education. I have students who have sensory issues and will not tolerate a mask all day. I need help with that.”

“My location doesn’t have a nurse. I would like to see one there.”

“I’m not interested in learning a new normal. I’m not interested in doing double the work for the small amount of money we make. Nothing is possible without teachers yet we’re expected to be miracle workers.”

“It is impossible time wise and money wise to get the vast majority of safety measures in place considering that in DeSoto County student’s first day is August 6th. I beg those who are in decision making positions to please take more time. Death is final and in this case even preventable if schools virtual or distance learning for the fall semester, as the data is closely monitored.”

“I feel like a broken record. I want the kids to be safe. Whatever resources it takes to ensure that. If distance learning needs to be implemented, we need to make sure every student has access to good internet connections and devices capable of what we’re asking them to do.”

TECHNOLOGY; maybe through a “bond program”? Laptops will also would help bridge the so-called “digital divide,” providing more opportunities for students from lower-income families to access the internet and other educational programs.

“I’ve had the virus myself while being pregnant and it was the worst thing I have been through. We need to stop the spread!! If one teacher gets it, they have exposed almost 100 students plus whoever they came in contact with. Also with having maternity leave, I will have to use all of my days for that. If I were to get the virus again and have to be out for 14 more days, how would I feed my 3 kids that month? MDE needs to consider everything. “

“I think that it is dangerous to open schools in a traditional sense when the number of positive cases are still rising. Sending a thousand children into a building all at once is not a good idea. It’s dangerous for students as well as the educators. It’s dangerous for the families of anyone associated with schools as well.”

"I think it's a terrible idea. Not only is it putting the students, faculty, and staff at a higher risk of contracting COVID19, but they are risking their family members. This is especially true for those who live with grandparents or who have (or family who have) preexisting medical conditions. I would personally prefer Remote Learning where the students are required to sign into the class every day for high school students. Since a lot of these students are already taking remote or hybrid college classes, it should be an easi(er) transition."

"Reopening school in August is very risky for all those involved, students and teachers. Once ONE person is infected with Covid, that's a whole class that will need to quarantine for 14 days (we won't be in school anyway). I think the cycle will repeat itself. So rightfully the same group of people can possibly be in quarantine time after time. Therefore, just how much will we be in school? I really don't feel that the buildings will be sanitized and clean properly. We (teachers) can only control the level of cleanliness in our rooms. What about the bathrooms, cafeteria, other places everyone have to visit? We are fearful of our safety. It's going to be a task trying to keep Elementary kids socially distanced."

"I think we are rushing it just to make certain people happen. I don't think we are ready to reopen and I'm nervous about returning to work. I shouldn't have to choose between my job and my health. My kids are doing the online option."

"I'm very conflicted. I want students to return to a sense of normalcy and stability, which in-person learning would provide, yet I'm also afraid that face-to-face learning will cause a huge uptick in cases. My husband is high-risk, and I'm afraid of carrying the disease to him."

"Terrified because we don't have funds to keep rooms clean, masks for everyone will have to be provided, social distancing will be impossible, and transmittal will be a problem."

"I'm very apprehensive abt returning while our numbers are continuing to rise. I am a cancer survivor and my 71 yr old mother lives with me. I am afraid for my own health as well as hers. I know the importance of returning to normal but honestly I don't think we are there yet. Safety for all involved should be the number one priority when deciding to reopen schools!"

"One death from trying to learn is too many. This is a Global Pandemic and we should acknowledge the scope of this problem."

"The health and welfare of our school staff cannot be a second thought. It's time to make smart changes."

"I am very concerned about returning this fall. I have a young child who I have to come home to everyday, as well as a mother with an autoimmune disease. My biggest fear is bringing the virus home and possibly giving it to them. I wonder everyday how we will clean restrooms between each child or at certain periods of the day. I also think about the students who may be asymptotic transferring the virus."

"I am scared to death."

PART V: MAE Recommendations

Based on early survey results and conversations with educators and experts, MAE proposes that prior to reopening buildings and physically returning to school, the following criteria be met:

1. Mandated mask use in all schools.
2. All students, educators, and volunteers have access to proper training and protective gear. Educators should be provided with face shields so that students can see non-verbal facial cues. This is critical from a classroom management perspective and is an important part of a child's development.
3. Schools have the cleaning supplies and custodial staff required to ensure buildings are being cleaned and disinfected according to CDC guidelines.
4. All education support professionals, such as maintenance workers and custodial staff, have resources and training needed to maintain clean campuses and schools.
5. A plan to have students' temperatures taken before entering the building or boarding a bus must be developed.
6. Access to testing for students and educators who exhibit symptoms of COVID-19.

In the event that a full physical return to school buildings is deemed unsafe and we look to distance learning or a hybrid model that utilizes distance learning and a limited return to school buildings, the following considerations should be a priority for district and state leadership and policymakers:

1. Internet access and devices such as laptops are provided equitably for every educator and student household.
2. Materials, such as packets or books, are provided as alternatives to digital resources to ensure all students have access to high-quality instructional content.
3. All families receive appropriate lessons for students to complete at home based on grade level and ability (inclusive of physical education, music, arts, and other enrichment areas) as well as information on how to facilitate student learning, including online tutorials and access to educators or experts who can assist them.
4. Schools engage all educators in crafting and communicating distance and digital learning plans.
5. Schools communicate with all educators and the families of students with special needs related to implementing plans for the continuation of services.
6. Schools communicate procedures with all students—particularly those whose educational progress, such as third grade promotion or high school graduation—that has the potential to be particularly disrupted by extended school closures.
7. Students have safe and reliable access to school counselors and social workers and can safely report abuse and bullying in the pandemic crisis.
8. All students and families have safe, reliable, and affordable access to community healthcare and equitable access to supplemental assistance programs for food, transportation, and housing.
9. All students have a timely, secure, and confidential way to ask educators or other trusted persons for help if their health, safety, or well-being is under threat—including those who may not have access to the internet.
10. Schools provide clear communication with all educators regarding closures and work expectations on a regular basis and provide training on effective techniques to prepare and deliver successful distance and digital learning.

11. All educators have a secure way to submit feedback and grade reports to all students and families without compromising student data privacy or information security—including those who may not have access to the internet.
12. All educators are consulted on how to assign grades, keeping in mind factors such as student access to digital and/or alternative educational content or other extenuating personal circumstances.

MAE also requests that state assessment and accountability requirements for the 2020-2021 academic year be waived by the State Board of Education.