



THE STATE
of **ALASKA**
GOVERNOR MIKE DUNLEAVY

**Department of Education
& Early Development**

DIVISION OF INNOVATION &
EDUCATION EXCELLENCE

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June 9, 2020

Honorable Betsy DeVos, Secretary of Education
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Secretary DeVos:

In June 2019, Alaska adopted the *K-12 Science Standards for Alaska*, providing a new foundation for defining what students should know and be able to do in terms of scientific knowledge and skills. As a result, Alaska has undertaken efforts to design, develop, and implement a new assessment to replace the *Alaska Science Assessment* with an assessment aligned to the *K-12 Science Standards for Alaska*. The Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) formally requests a one-year waiver on accountability testing for science for the 2020-2021 school year, pursuant to section 8401(b) of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in the following statutory provisions:

- Sections 1111(b)(2)(B)(v)(II)(aa) and 1111(b)(2)(B)(v)(II)(bb) that requires states to test all students in science not less than one time during grades 3 through 5, 6 through 8, and once in high school
- Section 1111(b)(2)(B)(v)(X) that requires reporting results for students, schools, and districts.

Work to develop the new assessment aligned to the *K-12 Science Standards for Alaska* is currently underway. DEED plans to conduct a full-census field test of the new assessment for students in grades 5, 8, and 10 in the spring of 2021. Aggregated district and state results from the 2021 field test will be communicated to Alaska school districts. The new assessment, aligned to the *K-12 Science Standards for Alaska* will be administered to all students in grades 5, 8, and 10 in 2022.

DEED requests a waiver from the requirements described above for the following reasons:

- A waiver from the requirements to test using the legacy *Alaska Science Assessment* will allow DEED to focus on the design and development of a new, improved assessment, aligned to current standards.
- The differences between the previous science standards and the *K-12 Science Standards for Alaska* (that are based on the Framework for K-12 Science Education) make embedding field test items in the legacy assessment infeasible.
- A waiver from the requirements to test using the *Alaska Science Assessment* will alleviate the burden of double testing and reduce testing time for Alaska's students.

- A waiver from the requirements to test using the *Alaska Science Assessment* will suspend the assessment of outdated standards and familiarize Alaska's educators and students with a new assessment aligned to new standards.

If granted the requested waiver, Alaska provides the following assurances:

- All eligible students in grades 5, 8, and 10 will participate in the full-census field test in spring 2021.
- DEED will notify all local education agencies (LEAs) of participation in the 2021 field test.
- Aggregated district and state results from the field test will be communicated with districts.
- DEED will provide participation rates in the 2021 field test to the United States Department of Education.

Prior to submission of this request, Alaska engaged LEAs to provide public comment. All public comment is included with this request.

Please direct questions regarding this request to DEED's Assessment Administrator, Isaac Paulson, at 907-465-8431 or isaac.paulson@alaska.gov.

Sincerely,



Michael Johnson

Commissioner, Alaska Department of Education & Early Development

cc: Karen Melin, Deputy Commissioner
Tammy Van Wyhe, Director, Division of Innovation & Education Excellence
Deborah Riddle, Division Operations Manager
Isaac Paulson, Assessments Administrator