



California LEAs will receive option of using state or local assessments

In a highly anticipated decision, the federal government will likely grant local educational agencies substantial flexibility over the administration of student assessments — specifically, the option of using locally developed assessments instead of state tests — to meet federal guidelines. In an announcement that could come as early as Monday, April 5, the U.S. Department of Education is expected to sign off on a plan that would allow California LEAs to use either state or local exams in their annual testing, even if the state does not receive a general waiver of federal assessment requirements.

That's welcome news for the state, which had contended that LEAs should be able to use either state or local assessments, whichever they see fit, to satisfy federal standards. It was not clear whether the U.S. Department of Education would agree with this interpretation, but the pending announcement indicates the state can pursue its plan without a general waiver.

[CSBA and a coalition of education stakeholders successfully urged the State Board of Education and the State Superintendent to include the following components into a federal waiver:](#)

- Suspension of the requirement for the administration of the statewide annual standardized summative assessments in English Language Arts and Mathematics
- Use of local and/or interim English Language Arts and Mathematics assessments to fulfill state requirements to monitor student progress and report data to parents, educators and the public

The [state plan, developed and approved by the State Board of Education during its February and March meetings](#), would pursue a waiver that seeks additional flexibility, including:

- Decoupling assessments from federal accountability requirements, while still collecting data to inform parents and teachers
- Waiving the requirement for at least 95 percent participation on the state's Smarter Balanced English language arts and math assessments

In guidance issued in February, the Department of Education indicated that it was not inviting states to apply for blanket waivers that forego testing altogether. The Department's guidance, however, outlined the availability of waivers from certain accountability and reporting requirement for the 2020–21 academic year. This is in contrast to the 2019–20 school year when the federal government provided a blanket waiver that allowed states to opt out of annual testing altogether.

The Department of Education's announcement will signal that the state's plan aligns with the range of flexibility it intends to provide to states and help provide certainty to LEAs, as they work on bringing students back to in-person instruction. CSBA will keep members updated on further developments on this closely watched issue.



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