

February 10, 2021

Indiana Department of Education
Att: Dr. Katie Jenner
115 W Washington St #600
Indianapolis, IN 46204

Re: **Request IDOE to Address Testing & Accountability Due to COVID-19 Implications**

Dear State Secretary of Education Dr. Jenner,

March 2020 through present day our schools have been under stressful and complex circumstances due to significant implications from COVID-19. Our teachers, administrators and staff have been flexible while maintaining health safety as the top priority during the pandemic. The only constant during the pandemic has been change; yet, that has not been the case with ILEARN and other state testing requirements for 2021.

As leaders and teachers in Public Schools in Marion County we see daily first hand the toll this pandemic has taken on students/families, teachers/school staff and on the teaching and learning process. Our time with students this semester should be spent engaged with the teaching and learning process, not a four week window of testing for ILEARN. Our students need those 20 days of instruction in order to provide the time for lost learning opportunities.

We stand in full support of the collective letter to IDOE advocating reconsideration of ILEARN requirements from Superintendents representing the following School Districts: Carmel Clay, Hamilton Heights, Hamilton Southeastern, Noblesville, Sheridan, Tipton, Westfield Washington and Zionsville.

In addition to their strong points and call for modifications to ILEARN, we advocate for IDOE to **cancel state testing requirements for 2021 and implement a hold harmless approach for accountability** for the following reasons and considerations:

- Broaden testing modifications and/or cancellations for 2021 beyond ILEARN and consider ISTEP+, IREAD-3, WIDA, and I AM due to extraordinary social and emotional impact COVID-19 has created for our students.
- Testing requirements from IDOE for ISTEP+, which is a high-stakes graduation requirement for seniors and an accountability measure for juniors, create numerous complexities when our high schools are not able to be open for full-time attendance as dictated by our local health department. Due to COVID-19 and social distancing requirements, it is extremely challenging to administer the IDOE testing requirements in a hybrid schedule and for students who remain virtual only.

- The 20 instructional day testing window takes precious instruction time away to address the COVID-19 learning loss. Past average testing time for ILEARN has been between 8-10 hours based on grade level, but many students usually take longer than the average time. Also, ILEARN is an untimed assessment allowing a student to take as long as they need. All of these items make it likely that many students will not complete ILEARN assessments within the current window.
- Modify the current IDOE expectation that 100% of ELs must complete WIDA testing. We have parents who will not send their child to school at this time for a variety of health related concerns due to COVID-19. Schools should not be held accountable for a parent's decision.
- There will likely be students who test positive or are contact-traced yielding 10-14 day quarantines which make it very unlikely these students would be present to complete all testing. Our school corporations in Marion County have already had to deal with quarantining an entire class, individual students, groups of students, etc. This consideration needs to be taken seriously. Current accountability measures would penalize schools for scenarios like this.
- Bringing virtual students in for testing is very problematic. These students and their families have chosen virtual learning for numerous reasons involving health and safety due to COVID-19. (Requiring these students to come to school for testing is a major public health safety concern.) Families should not have to choose between their personal health concerns and state testing. Parents are indicating that they will not send their students to schools in order to test. We cannot force families to send their children to take the test in-person, and again, accountability measures would penalize schools when this happens. If left unchanged, this will set schools up to fail at no fault of their own.
- We have several other assessments that will have to be given near simultaneously as the state standardized tests such as High Ability testing and Dyslexia testing to meet IDOE requirements. We will conduct all this testing instead of using this time for instruction and remediation of students that we know are in great need of those services likely pushing them further behind academically.
- Like students, staff also have implications and absences due to COVID-19. IDOE has already suggested that schools could get a waiver to allow non-certified employees be test administrators for assessments. This has never been allowed in the past as it makes testing irregularities and invalidations more likely to occur.
- Advocate with the USDOE to modify state testing accountability for participation. Accountability mandates that 95% of students participate in accountability-based assessments such as ISTEP+ and ILEARN, even though due to COVID-19 large portions of our students only attend school virtually.

The stress and strain the pandemic has placed on schools have been exponential since March 2020. We urge you to make the right decision to **cancel state testing for 2021 and implement a hold harmless approach for accountability.** Each School District in Marion County has

assessments in place to monitor student academic progress without state testing. Please allow us time this Spring with our students in teaching and learning not state testing.

Sincerely,

Marion County Public School Superintendents & Teacher Association Presidents

Dr. Paul Kaiser, Beech Grove City Schools, Ms. Gina Herman, BGEA
Dr. Bruce Hibbard, Franklin Township Community Schools & Ms. Cathy Smith, FTEA
Dr. Matthew Prusiecki, MSD of Decatur Township & Ms. Ann Kuper/Matt Timmons, DEA
Dr. Shawn A. Smith, MSD of Lawrence Township & Mr. Justin Brown, LEA
Dr. Flora Reichenadter, MSD of Pike Township & Mr. Chris Ludy, PCTA
Dr. Timothy Hanson, MSD of Warren Township & Ms. Jenny Whitaker, WEA
Dr. Nikki Woodson, MSD of Washington Township & Mrs. Sabra Gage, WTEA
Dr. Jeff Butts, MSD of Wayne Township & Ms. Kim Arnold, WTCTA
Dr. Kyle Trebley, School Town of Speedway & Mr. Geoff Mahan, SCTA