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To: Senator Kirsten Gillibrand
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From: Suffolk County School Superintendents Association (SCSSA) Legislative Committee
Julie Davis Lutz, Ph.D. Legislative Committee Chair

Date: March 19, 2021

Re: Waiver for State Assessments

We write to you as school district leaders in Suffolk County about a time sensitive matter. The need to provide end-of-year state assessments (Grades 3 through 8 math and ELA testing and Regents Exams) in schools is driven by the Federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Prior to the appointment of the new Secretary of Education, Miguel Cardona, the U.S. Department of Education announced that ESSA accountability testing would be required for this year. The New York State Education Department, which oversees the accountability and testing process for New York State schools, has requested a waiver of these assessments for the 2020-2021 school year. The requested waiver has not yet been granted.

The impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the continuity of instruction, as well as the mental and physical health of students, teachers, and their families, has been enormous. During this critical time, all of our efforts as educators and leaders need to be focused on safely returning students to full in-person instruction, while attending to their mental health and addressing learning gaps attributable to the pandemic. Throughout the pandemic and during the shift to multiple forms of instruction (fully remote, hybrid, and in-person), school districts have been monitoring individual student academic progress and using that data to immediately address any deficiencies in learning using numerous support services available. This timely work and data is more relevant and important than the ESSA accountability measures.

Given the inequities exposed and exacerbated over the past year's circumstances, administering state level annual assessments will only result in, at best, confusing, and at worse, meaningless data. We strongly urge you to encourage Secretary Cardona to reconsider this guidance and provide for a one-year federal waiver on mandated testing.

While we strongly support accountability for schools, the challenges of teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic have been extraordinary. With students and teachers navigating through a once in a century pandemic, we ask you to support this important relief.

cc: Commissioner Betty A. Rosa
SCSSA Members