Dear Congressional Delegation/Dr. Cardona,

On behalf of the <Insert COE >, I write to explain why it is so important that The U.S. Department of Education offers States the option of assessment and accountability waivers for the 2020-21 school year.

We remain committed to supporting our staff and students and welcome the chance to have more of them returning to in-person instruction as soon as we can safely do so. As we navigate the myriad considerations and decisions that go into that work, we must reiterate the importance of prioritizing instructional time and a focus on learning. When we look at the 100-day timeline being supported by the Biden Administration, it is important for you to understand how that timeline coincides with the spring testing window in California.

If staff and students return to schools only to pivot to standardized testing within days or weeks, it will only compound many of the complications of addressing very real learning loss and exacerbate the negative aspects of statewide assessments. We regularly receive reports from teachers and principals each year of the negative impact these assessments have on students. Panic attacks, significant anxiety, and physical illness are not uncommon. In a year where the mental health of our students is being jeopardized on a daily basis, we must seek ways to alleviate, not exacerbate, the issue.

As we seek to safely reopen schools in the spring, testing will lead to lost opportunities for learning when our students need it most. It is hard to imagine the resulting pressure and continued drain on mental health if students and teachers must go from blended or virtual instructional models right into standardized test administration. And for our students whose parents have opted for remote learning, they will not have the option of taking state assessments in the same mode. Parents may be unwilling to send their student to school for the assessments; and if the students do come in person, it adds to the challenge of social distancing.

The data that stands to be collected from any assessment this year will be unreliable and invalid in comparison to other testing years, a reality we cannot accept when we know that data will absolutely be used to compare schools while providing no instructionally useful information that can positively impact teaching and curriculum decisions.

Public education thrives on certainty and the ability to plan. In any scenario, the physical and mental health of students, staff and families should outweigh any benefits standardized tests offer We strongly support federal flexibility allowing state and local education agencies discretion in selecting and administering the tests they need to reliably, efficiently, and quickly evaluate student learning progress, needs and gaps. We urge the U.S. Education Department to offers states assessment/accountability waivers for the 2020-21 school year.

Thank you for your leadership as it relates to the federal response to and support for our nation’s public

schools and students as we continue to navigate the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Sincerely,