



# COVID-19 FAQ for State Testing

**Yellow Highlighting** = Most Recent Updates

These 2020 state and federal waivers are important as they provide school districts with some relief and the ability to focus locally on the basic educational services and needs of the students. Waiving these testing requirements will have implications under the state Administrative Rules for Montana (ARM) Chapter 56 and 55 and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Therefore, the OPI is seeking public comment on these approved waivers. Any comments on this waiver should be directed to [essainput@mt.gov](mailto:essainput@mt.gov).

## Q: What actions are being taken to address this unfolding situation?

- **Thursday, March 26:** The Montana Board of Public Education voted to waive the 2020 testing requirements for Montana schools. The OPI has submitted a one-year waiver to the U. S. Department of Education to waive requirements for assessment, accountability, and reporting for states and local education agencies under ESSA.
- **Thursday, March 26:** View [state-specific guidance](#) for Montana educators using interims and the Digital Library in remote-learning situations.
- **Friday, March 20:** The U.S. Department of Education has released that states are allowed to submit a one-year waiver to waive requirements for assessment, accountability, and reporting for states and local education agencies under ESSA.
  - The OPI is in the process of submitting this one-year waiver and should know Montana's approval status within one business day. Please see [Secretary DeVos' memo](#) on the details of this simplified state waiver process. Any comments on this waiver should be directed to [essainput@mt.gov](mailto:essainput@mt.gov).
- **Wednesday, March 18:** In light of the ongoing closures, the OPI is in communication with the Board of Public Education requesting suspension of assessments in Montana while also requesting a waiver for testing requirements from the US Department of Education.
- **Monday, March 16:** Our primary concern is the health and safety of our schools, as such, the OPI staff have travel restrictions until April 17. If your school had an OPI site visit previously scheduled during this timeframe, the Assessment Division will reach out to you individually for plans on conducting a virtual site visit in lieu of the in-person assessment observation.
- **Sunday, March 15:** Governor Bullock announced directives for all non-residential public schools in Montana to close until March 27, 2020. The OPI Assessment Division will continue to support the testing needs for residential public and accredited private schools.
- **Friday, March 13:** The Assessment Division [shared some information in the Assessment Bulletin](#) to address the COVID-19 situation.
- **Friday, March 13:** The OPI hosted a virtual call for Montana School Superintendents. During this call, guidance and information on the developing novel coronavirus situation was shared with schools and recommendations given on the steps to prepare locally. Per the assessment

**Note:** This information is current as of March 30, 2020.



requirements, we encourage schools to familiarize themselves with the published U.S. Department of Education (USED) resources: [[Fact Sheet: Impact of COVID-19 on Assessments and Accountability](#)] and the [[Press Release](#)]. The USED has also created a [[COVID-19 Website](#)].

- For the latest information as it pertains to Montana students, visit the [[OPI/DPHHS COVID-19 Website](#)].
- During this school closure period, the OPI will work with USED and its testing vendors to understand what options exist including testing window extensions. We will continue to share updates on the status of assessment testing as new developments occur.

### Q: Is there anything our district is required to do with the state/federal waiver requests?

- **Monday, March 30:** The U.S. Department of Education (USED) requires that opportunity for public comment on the statewide assessment waiver be maintained, even if approval is already granted. Any comments on this waiver should be directed to [essainput@mt.gov](mailto:essainput@mt.gov).
- **Monday, March 30:** On Thursday, March 26, the Board of Public Education voted to waive the [10.56.102\(3\)](#) state requirements for assessment and on Friday, March 27, the OPI was notified that the state's waiver request for testing, accountability, and reporting was approved by the U.S. Department of Education (USED). At this time, the OPI is unaware of any additional reporting required from local education agencies (school districts); however, given this federal waiver process was simplified and expedited to support states, it is possible some statutory and regulatory requirements were not addressed fully in the OPI's submission. The OPI is still reviewing what additional laws or regulations might need to be waived and request these additional waivers through USED during this novel coronavirus pandemic (e.g., Office of Civil Rights (OCR)). For these reasons, the OPI cannot say with certainty all reporting requirements have been satisfied, but as soon as we know, we will update the [OPI COVID-19 Assessment FAQ](#) with guidance.

### Q: What are the assessment requirements for participation?

- **Monday, March 30:** On Thursday, March 26, the Board of Public Education voted to waive the [10.56.102\(3\)](#) state requirements for assessment and on Friday, March 27, the OPI was notified that the state's waiver request for testing, accountability, and reporting was approved by the U.S. Department of Education (USED).

### Q: Will the testing windows be extended?

- **Monday, March 30:** Statewide assessment requirements [10.56.102\(3\)](#) have been waived by the Board of Public Education on Thursday, March 26, and on Friday, March 27, the OPI was notified that the state's waiver request for testing, accountability, and reporting was approved by the U.S. Department of Education (USED).

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- **Tuesday, March 24:** Montana juniors will have the opportunity to take the ACT free of charge this coming fall semester of their senior year. For more information, see the [OPI/MUS Press Release](#) - October 6, October 20, and November 3, 2020.

### **Q: What happens if our classes don't resume or we aren't able to meet the 95% participation requirement?**

- **Monday, March 30:** Given that the State and Federal assessment waivers have been approved Montana students will not be required to participate in the statewide assessment in FY2020; however, given this federal waiver process was simplified and expedited to support states, it is possible some statutory and regulatory requirements were not addressed fully in the OPI's submission. The OPI is still reviewing what additional laws or regulations might need to be waived and request these additional waivers through USED during this novel coronavirus pandemic (e.g., Office of Civil Rights (OCR)). For these reasons, the OPI cannot say with certainty all reporting requirements have been satisfied, but as soon as we know, we will update the [OPI COVID-19 Assessment FAQ](#) with guidance.

### **Q: What do we do with the ACT March 24<sup>th</sup> materials?**

- **Wednesday, March 18:** ACT Test Coordinators received an email providing information about the return of secure testing materials meant for the March 24 test window. In summary:
  - Please **return your ACT test booklets and accommodations materials**, as instructed in the Collecting, Packing, and Returning Materials section of the Test Coordinator (TC) Information Manual. **Remember to include any materials related to student supports and accommodations.**
  - If your school will not be open for the pre-scheduled pickup of materials indicated on your [Schedule of Events](#), TCs can return the materials to a FedEx office; be sure to get a receipt. If you are unable to return your test booklets now, you must keep all test materials in secure storage and return the test booklets to ACT immediately once your school has re-opened.
  - **Mark your school as "Did Not Test" in PearsonAccess Next** [click.operations.act.org]. Instructions for this task can be found in the Test Coordinator Information Manual and in the email received from ACT this morning.
- **Tuesday, March 17:** Per discussion with the OPI's test delivery vendor, **all ACT testing is to be suspended until the April 21 testing window**. Instructions for returning materials will be sent to Test Coordinators in the next several days; in general, remember that you must return test booklets but should not return student answer sheets. ACT will send materials automatically to all schools in time for the April 21 test window; no orders need to be placed.

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## Q: What can I do to ensure that Student Data & Privacy are protected during COVID-19?

- Tuesday, March 17:** U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos issued new resources today that will assist education leaders in [protecting student privacy \[lnks.gd\]](#) and [ensuring students with disabilities continue to receive services \[lnks.gd\]](#) required under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) during school closures due to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.
  - Additional guidance will be announced in the coming days and posted at [ed.gov/coronavirus \[lnks.gd\]](#).

## Q: Who do we contact for technical (how-to) support?

**We are here to help. Please contact us.**

**Assessment Help Desk: 1-844-867-2569**

Help Desk for SBAC   MSA   AMSA		
E-mail	Phone	Website
<a href="mailto:mthelpdesk@air.org">mthelpdesk@air.org</a>	877-365-7915	<a href="#">AIR Portal</a>

Help Desk for ACT		
E-mail	Phone	Website
	800-553-6244	<a href="#">Pearson Access Next (PA Next)</a>
<a href="#">Email Form</a>	319-337-1270	<a href="#">State ACT Testing and District Testing</a>

Help Desk for MSAA		
E-mail	Phone	Website
<a href="mailto:MSAAServiceCenter@MeasuredProgress.org">MSAAServiceCenter@MeasuredProgress.org</a>	866-834-8879	<a href="#">MSAA System</a>

## Q: Who do we contact for state policy support?

### Questions? Contact

Office of Public Instruction Staff		
E-mail	Phone	Website
<a href="mailto:OPIAssessmentHelpDesk@mt.gov">OPIAssessmentHelpDesk@mt.gov</a>	844-867-2569	<a href="#">OPI Statewide Assessment Testing Pages</a>

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OFFICE OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION  
STATE OF MONTANA

Putting Montana Students First **A<sup>+</sup>**



As always, we thank you and your dedicated staff for all of your hard work, training, and preparation efforts to support students and to meet these state and federal testing requirements.

—The OPI Assessment Division

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