

# BOARD OF EDUCATION OF FREDERICK COUNTY

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Jay Mason  
President

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March 3, 2021

Maryland State Board of Education  
200 West Baltimore Street  
Baltimore, MD 21201

Re: Administration of State Assessments in 2021

Dear Superintendent Salmon and Members of the Maryland State Board of Education:

Frederick County Public Schools (FCPS) serves over 44,000 students. Along with their families, our students have done their very best during the COVID-19 pandemic. Likewise, FCPS employees—over 6,000 of them—have stepped up at every stage of this public health emergency with pivots to implement continuity of learning, virtual instruction, intensive in-person small groups for vulnerable students, hybrid instruction, and an assertive return to play and extracurricular activities plan with numerous other adaptations along the way. Every person in our school system is working now to ensure health and safety and to provide the best instruction possible to every student – every student and every school community has different, specific needs right now. We must focus on those needs.

The Board of Education of Frederick County (Board) is unanimous in our statement: **This is not the time for State assessments.**

School communities have provided a sense of connection and continuity to our students and their families. More than half of FCPS students are attending school in-person for the last few weeks. Implementing a hybrid schedule for all levels and programs, Pre-K through high school, was a monumental undertaking for FCPS and required transitions for every student, teacher, staff member, and classroom. Students need time to acclimate to school environments. Administering State assessments, even abbreviated versions, will harm nascent connections and routines which are essential for student engagement, achievement, and well-being.

Under the best of circumstances, State assessments disrupt the instructional environment – for scheduling, staffing, time, and other logistics. Currently, to ensure social distancing, space and movement within buildings are limited significantly. For students accessing all of their instruction virtually, there are no guarantees of test security or any clear plans for proctored administration. These are unworkable scenarios for State assessments.

Our Board understands and appreciates that there is a benefit locally and to our State and Federal partners in understanding how student achievement has declined because of COVID-19. Identifying gaps in instruction and achievement is among our Board's highest priorities. Even prior to COVID-19, we apply FCPS Policy 444, Educational Equity, for every decision. Our Board understands that COVID-19 school disruptions have impacted our students of color, students who receive special education services, students who are learning English and students from families who are economically vulnerable most of all. The pandemic has shined a spotlight into every educational and social inequity. State assessments will not address these issues. Testing right now is a demoralizing and unproductive proposition.

We have all lived through trauma – our students, families, and staff have faced illness, death, and a variety of hardships, economic and other. Adding more stress, particularly when there is no clear benefit to data that would be derived through testing, is wrong. FCPS is focused on helping students recover – academically, emotionally, socially, and physically. Our educators use and adapt local assessments and a variety of other proven tools to gather data that allow our school teams to help students where they are right now and to develop plans to address gaps. Our Board is committed to sharing detailed information on our students' achievement and growth using tools and measures that help our students.

Thank you for your time, service, and consideration. This is not the time for State assessments. We look forward to collaborating on services and supports that will help our students as we continue to move through and recover from the pandemic.

Sincerely,

Jay Mason  
President

Karen Yoho  
Vice-President

Brad W. Young  
Board Member

Elizabeth Barrett  
Board Member

David Bass  
Board Member

Sue Johnson  
Board Member

Jason "Mr. J." Johnson  
Board Member