

September 14, 2020

Secretary Betsy DeVos  
U.S. Department of Education  
400 Maryland Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20202

**RE: Agency Information Collection Activities; Comment Request; Evaluation of the Innovative Assessment Demonstration Authority Pilot Program-Preliminary Activities (ED-2020-SCC-0112)**

Secretary DeVos,

The Center for American Progress writes to provide recommendations to the U.S. Department of Education (ED) regarding its Notice of Proposed Information Collection Activities and Evaluation of the Innovative Assessment Demonstration Authority Pilot Program, published on July 14, 2020.

The Innovative Assessment Demonstration Authority (IADA) is one of the primary tools authorized under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to drive toward a more innovative and effective system of education that fosters and measures deeper learning skills and competencies, including the mastery of rigorous academic content, critical thinking and problem solving, collaboration, effective communication, self-directed learning and academic mindsets. These skills and abilities are critical to impart in students if they are to access opportunity, especially for those students whose funds and programs ESSA is designed to serve.

Our comments are intended to help ensure the IADA reports are created in accordance with the law, are sufficient to allow states to learn and adapt their assessment practices, and useful to inform the next reauthorization of ESSA.

The notice issued by ED regarding the information collection and evaluation of the Innovative Assessment Demonstration Authority states a study will result in two reports, a “Progress Report” and a “Best Practices Report,” as mandated by Congress. The notice continues to highlight the information that will be used for each report, with the Progress Report based on existing documents from IADA pilot states, and the Best Practices Report informed by surveys from principals, teachers and district leaders. We believe this approach to creating the Progress and Best Practices Reports is inconsistent with what the law mandates under Section 1204 of ESSA.

Section 1204(c)(2) of ESSA clearly states the Progress Report “shall be based on annual information submitted by participating states as described in subsection (e)(2)(B)(ix),” and examine each innovative assessment system using the 5 criteria listed in Section 1204(c)(2)(A-B). It’s not clear that ED will use these criteria in its review of “existing documents from pilot states,” and the law requires these specific elements be used in the creation of the report. These include the use of feedback in making course corrections; building capacity to implement new assessment systems, and, ensuring the assessments meet specified technical criteria.

The Best Practices Report must expand beyond the “perspectives of district leaders, principals, and teachers.” Section 1204(m)(1) of ESSA clearly articulates the best practices disseminated by ED must meet the requirements listed in Section 1204(m)(1)(A-E):

- Section 1204(m)(1)(A-E)
  - I. “meet the requirements of section 1111(b)(2)(B)”
  - II. “are comparable with statewide assessments under section 1111(b)(2)”
  - III. “include assessment tasks that determine proficiency or mastery of State-approved competencies aligned to challenging State academic standards”
  - IV. “effective supports for local educational agencies and school staff to implement innovative assessment systems”
  - V. “effective engagement and support of teachers in developing and scoring assessments and the use of high- quality professional development”
  - VI. “effective supports for all students, particularly each of the subgroups of students, as defined in section 1111(c)(2), participating in the innovative assessment system”
  - VII. “standardized and calibrated scoring rubrics, and other strategies, to ensure inter-rater reliability and comparability of determinations of mastery or proficiency across local educational agencies and the State”

In addition to adhering to Congressional requirements when creating the Progress and Best Practices Reports we suggest that ED articulate how the Best Practices report will include all the above requirements, as well as:

- I. The advantages and the challenges of innovative assessments, especially with regards to comparability;
- II. The frequency and utility of student performance data provided to teachers in adjusting instructional practice;
- III. Changes in student performance based on the utility and frequency of data provided to teachers;
- IV. The use of outside experts in assessments as critical partners and reviewers, such as those sitting on state Technical Advisory Committees, who frequently decide matters on state assessment systems; and,
- V. Analysis differentiated by pilot stage, as the information gleaned at each phase will vary.

**Recommendation:**

Based on our analysis of the Notice and the requirements of ESSA, we recommend that ED issue a revised notice that shows clear alignment between what is being collected and what Congress mandated be collected. Furthermore, the revised notice should include data related to changes in instructional practice and student learning. These reports are incredibly useful tools in improving how to use assessments to improve student achievements and should not be a missed opportunity.

Sincerely,

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Center for American Progress