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June 23, 2016

The Honorable John B. King, Jr.
Secretary
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue Southwest
Washington, D.C. 20202-0001

Dear Secretary King:

Due to significant, widespread, and unexplained technical problems that prevented Alaska's students from completing the Alaska Measures of Progress (AMP) assessment in a way that will provide valid, reliable data about what they know and can do, the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) has requested a waiver from the federal requirements to assess students each year in language arts and math and once each grade span in science for School Year 2015-16. DEED has also requested a waiver from the requirement to report data obtained through the statewide assessment at the school, district, and state levels. I urge you to approve both waiver requests promptly.

As we discussed on April 12, 2016 when you appeared before the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, a number of technical problems associated with the AMP—both before and after the internet cable at the University of Kansas was severed—compromised the functionality of the AMP assessment this year. Uniform testing conditions were compromised. Students' answers were lost. Alaska has determined, based on the advice from nationally recognized testing experts, that the problems many school districts experienced materially impacted the validity and reliability of this year's assessment results. DEED's Technical Advisory Committee concurred with Interim Commissioner McCauley's decision to cancel testing until such time as the testing vendor could identify and fix what went wrong and provide reasonable assurances that students could resume testing without further errors. Unfortunately, the testing vendor did not identify what went wrong, and was therefore unable to fix the errors or provide any assurances that testing could continue as intended.

As you know, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act requires, at Section 1111(b)(2)(B)(iii) and (iv) that statewide assessments be valid, reliable, consistent with nationally recognized testing standards, and of adequate

The Honorable John B. King, Jr.
Page 2

technical quality. Unfortunately, in this instance, it appears that the assessment given in Alaska this year did not meet those requirements.

In addition to the technical issues associated with the AMP, it should also be noted that this was the second—and last—year that this assessment would have been used to determine student proficiency. Last year, many educators criticized the results Alaska obtained from the AMP as being too vague to inform instruction. The controversy about the AMP's lack of usefulness materially compromised support for it among educators, parents, and the public. While this year's test was supposed to provide more actionable data, it was not intended to be given after this year. As a result, even if Alaska were able to tease some questionably valid and reliable data from this year's AMP administration, the data will not be comparable to previous or future assessment results.

Alaska has always complied with the requirements of the ESEA regarding both test administration and data reporting. The errors that invalidated this year's assessment are regrettable. Unfortunately, they cannot be remedied. Given that Alaska is working hard to meet the requirements of the ESEA as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act and to put in place a new assessment in time for next spring—both herculean tasks—under extremely constrained state fiscal conditions, I urge you to approve both waiver requests quickly.

I will look forward to learning your response before or during your appearance at the next meeting of the Senate HELP Committee on July 29th.

Sincerely,



Lisa Murkowski
United States Senator