

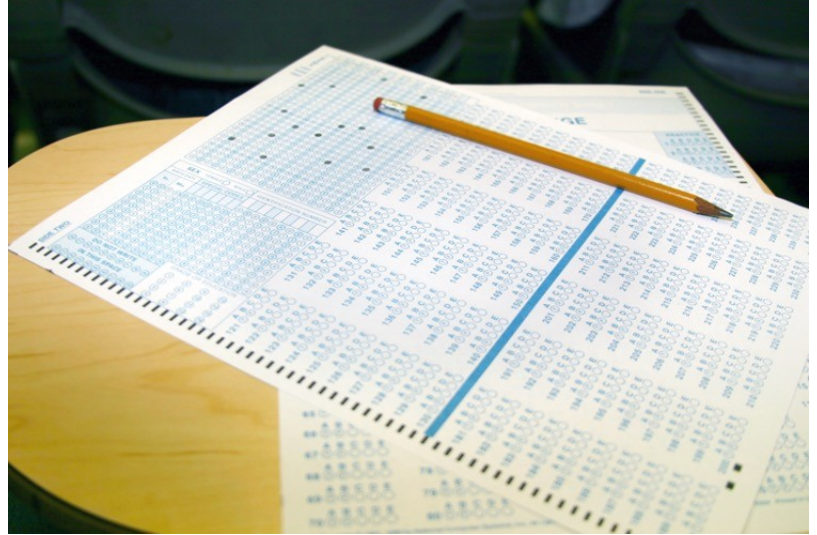


Written by [Luis Miguel](#) on March 4, 2021

Teachers' Unions Sour on Biden for Pushing Return of Standardized Tests

Tension has arisen between Joe Biden and some of his key allies as the administration is [pushing](#) for a return to standardized testing after a one-year pause, a return that teachers' unions and state leaders feel would place additional strain on them at a time when they are still balancing distance education and COVID-19 precautions.

Biden's Education Department surprisingly announced last week that it will now bring back standardized-testing requirements. While the Department is offering states "flexibility," critics of the move say it will needlessly burden schools and districts during an already chaotic time.



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The decision from the White House comes despite the fact that, on the campaign trail, Biden claimed to be against standardized tests, once telling a crowd of teachers that he'd end the practice in public schools and that it would be a "big mistake" to link teacher evaluations to their students' test scores.

Thus, the latest news from the Education Department is frustrating the national teachers' unions that backed his candidacy.

"We have to be really careful," said Ryan Stewart, New Mexico's public education secretary. "There are some definite concerns we have with regard to validity and reliability, and we have to be measured in the kinds of conclusions we draw from this year's assessments."

Georgia Superintendent of Schools Richard Woods had even stronger words.

"I completely disagree with this decision, and believe it shows the continued disconnect between Washington, D.C. and the realities of the classroom," he stated after the administration decided not to give "blanket waivers" for testing requirements. "I continue to believe that high-stakes standardized tests in the middle of a pandemic are not necessary, wise, or useful."

"Standardized tests are imperfect measures at best and often provide snapshots of student performance that are far too narrow to help educators in any given year, let alone during a once-in-a-lifetime global pandemic," said Tony Thurmond, California's state superintendent of public instruction.

For Thurmond, resources dedicated to test-taking could be better spent on helping students amid the COVID-19 outbreak.

"Even as more schools reopen in the weeks and months ahead, it seems unlikely there is enough time to meaningfully prepare our students for statewide tests," he added, arguing that remote testing "is simply not a viable option."

Educators are calling for a more flexible approach to testing.



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“Everyone who’s gone through the pandemic in the United States can make sense of why it’s logistically difficult right now to assess students in a standardized way,” said Mike Magee, CEO of the Chiefs for Change education organization. “Taking an approach that gives states an opportunity to create meaningful accommodations for students, and still provide meaningful assessments, is the right approach.”

Pennsylvania plans to move forward with testing this year. Officials say they are not seeking a government waiver because they have a “moral imperative” to measure learning via tests.

Nevertheless, acting Pennsylvania Education Secretary Noe Ortega said in a [letter](#) to federal officials that the high number of students in online-only mode, along with “increasing levels of staff quarantine,” make responsible testing impossible to conduct.

“The notion of standardized testing is that it’s given to all test takers in a common way based on common opportunities to learn,” said Bob Schaeffer, who serves as interim executive director of the FairTest organization. “All the assumptions that go behind standardized testing are false in 2021, because of pandemic-related learning conditions.”

This comes as several states throughout the country seek to open back up. Texas, for example, made headlines this week when Governor Greg Abbott, a Republican, declared that the Lone Star State would open at full capacity and scrap the mask mandate. Mississippi Governor Tate Reeves did the same in his state, making for a total of 16 states — including Florida, South Dakota, and Georgia — that do not have mask mandates. Alabama is [reportedly](#) soon to join the list.

Joe Biden was critical of the decisions, remarking, “The last thing, the last thing we need is Neanderthal thinking that in the meantime, everything’s fine, take off your mask, forget it.”

Democrats and left-leaning teachers’ unions may be relying on faulty science to argue that students need to stay home or wear masks while on campus, but is the silver lining to all this that at least the “pandemic” has caused them to temporarily oppose the standardized tests that take so much time from real learning?



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