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BY: _____

Richard Woods, Georgia's School Superintendent
"Educating Georgia's Future"

October 6, 2016

Samantha Fuhrey, Superintendent
Almond Turner, Newton County Board of Education Chair
Newton County School System
2109 Newton Drive, N.E.
P.O. Box 1469
Covington, GA 30015

Dear Superintendent Fuhrey and Chairman Turner:

I am writing in response to your July 20, 2016, letter requesting a waiver of the 2017 Georgia Milestones Assessment System in grades 3 – 8. Your request presents several hurdles which, unfortunately, we are unable to overcome at this time.

Georgia Milestones serves as the foundation of our state's College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) and the CCRPI, in turn, is instrumental in Newton County's Strategic Waiver contract. State law does not allow the State Board of Education to waive accountability requirements, which include administration of the state testing program (OCGA §20-2-82).

As states work to develop and implement their plans for the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the 2016-2017 school year has been established as a transitional period. States are required to continue to meet the requirements of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as reauthorized by No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Georgia has been granted continuation of key features of our approved ESEA waiver, allowing use of the CCRPI in lieu of calculating Adequately Yearly Progress; however, we remain under the mandate of administering the *same* assessment to *all* students enrolled in our public school system in grades 3 – 8 and high school. The State Board of Education does not have the authority to waive federal law.

Certainly the administration of the Iowa Assessments remains a local decision and nothing prohibits Newton County from utilizing the tests to inform instructional practice. The issue becomes one of comparability and accountability.

As our state moves toward implementation of ESSA, and a new federal administration issues regulations and guidance, my office will seek maximum flexibility. In the interim, Newton County may wish to work with its technical advisors to begin to establish and/or gather evidence that the Iowa assessments meet the requirements of academic assessments as mandated by ESSA, including but not limited to alignment to our state content standards. These requirements are outlined in guidance provided by the United States Department of Education (US ED) for the Peer Review of State Assessment Systems. An important

consideration that also must be addressed is comparability. Our Assessment Division is happy to discuss the requirements for state assessment and accountability systems with your team if you would find this helpful.

I regret that we are unable to approve your request. As you know, I share the concerns many have voiced about the over-emphasis on testing in our public schools. Both I and my staff are committed to working with districts and stakeholders to improve educational opportunities for our students.

Sincerely,



Richard Woods

cc: Mike Royal, State Board of Education Chair
Lisa Kinnemore, State Board of Education Vice Chair
Melissa Fincher, Ph.D., GaDOE Deputy Superintendent for Assessment & Accountability
Garry McGiboney, Ph.D., GaDOE Deputy Superintendent for Policy & External Affairs