

Education department to school



report: Education Department to School?, report20164. 03 States and school districts should evaluate the number of tests they administer to students and eliminate any deemed ineffective or duplicative, the Department of Education recommended in new assessment guidance released Saturday. The department is also recommending that states cap the percentage of time students spend taking required state assessments at 2 percent. Parents should receive a formal notice, the department said, if a school exceeds the cap. The guidance suggests that tests should cover the full range of each state's standards, a recommendation that comes on the heels of a study from the Center for American Progress that found the instructional materials states use often aren't entirely aligned to their standards. In addition, the department is asking states to ensure a level playing field for students with disabilities and those still learning English. Vice President Joe Biden, flanked by President Barack Obama and his wife Jill Biden, announces that he will not seek the presidency during a statement in the Rose Garden of the White House October 21, 2015 in Washington, D. C.

The guidance emphasizes that while some tests are for accountability purposes, the vast majority of assessments should be tools in a broader strategy to improve teachers and learning. No single assessment should ever be the sole factor in making an educational decision about a student, an educator, or a school, the guidance reads. Outgoing Education Secretary Arne Duncan has been consistent in emphasizing this point, despite pushing states to adopt teacher evaluation and compensation systems based in part on student test scores. I still have no question that we need to check at least once a year to make sure our kids are on track or identify areas where they

need support, Duncan said in a statement. But I can't tell you how many conversations I'm in with educators who are understandably stressed and concerned about an overemphasis on testing in some places and how much time testing and test prep are taking from instruction. The department underscored that the president's fiscal 2016 budget requested \$403 million for state assessments, which it noted states will be able to use to review their existing test.

By January, the department will provide additional guidance on what federal funds states and districts can tap to audit their current testing regimen. Good assessments are a part of the learning experience, and a critical tool to make sure that all students, including our most disadvantaged students, are learning, said John King, No. 2 at the Education Department who has been selected to replace Duncan. But duplicative, unnecessary or poor-quality, low-level tests subtract from learning time and undermine instruction. There are too many tests that do not provide useful information.

The federal government requires states to test students 17 times before graduation: annually in math and reading in grades 3 through 8, once in those subjects during high school, and then once in science during elementary, middle and high school. In this Thursday, Oct. 11, 2012 file photo, Pilar Quinn, a volunteer, teaches a GED preparation class at Marist School, in Atlanta. The class is for immigrants who are applying for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals.

The No Child Left Behind Act, the current version of the federal K-12 law, is largely blamed for ushering in an era of high-stakes testing in the public

education system. The accountability at the heart of the law required states to ensure a specific percentage of students was proficient in reading and math each year, and each year that percent had to increase. If states didn't reach annual proficiency goals, they could be subject to a series of sanctions.

And that type of accountability system resulted in states and school districts piling on their own tests to ensure students were on track to hit those proficiency marks. It's important that we're all honest with ourselves, Duncan noted. At the federal, state and local level, we have all supported policies that have contributed to the problem in implementation. We can and will work with states, districts, and educators to help solve it. The issue of testing has gained traction in the last year as Congress has been trying to rewrite NCLB. As lawmakers try to deliver a bill to the president's desk before the end of the year, the separate reauthorization proposals passed earlier this year by the House and Senate both include language that would incentivize states to evaluate their tests and eliminate any found to be duplicative or ineffective. ;,? report? report -X