



Dan Papineau is director of tax policy and regulatory affairs for the Michigan Chamber of Commerce. (Courtesy photo)

Without Michigan-specific data, attainable only by M-STEP assessment results, we will not be able to compare across all districts, schools and students in the state to give parents a clear picture of whether their child is on track, what degree of learning remediation is necessary and where resources are most needed to be directed.

Michael Rice, state superintendent of public instruction, and Casandra Ulbrich, State Board of Education president, made the case in [a recent Bridge Michigan guest commentary](#) that we should not give the state summative assessment, known as M-STEP, to Michigan students this year. Both Rice and Ulbrich argue that giving Michigan students the M-STEP test is unnecessary because they will be given benchmark assessments. They also believe the time spent on administering the M-STEP would be better spent on instruction. As the state's top education decision makers, the arguments made by Rice and Ulbrich are simply wrong and once again show that COVID-19 learning loss is not being taken seriously in Michigan.

The M-STEP cannot be replaced by benchmark assessments for two reasons.

First, benchmark assessments given to students across Michigan are not consistent. Michigan law allows districts to choose from five different, state-approved benchmark assessments, make up their own benchmark assessment, use what is vaguely referred to as progress monitoring tools or do something totally different altogether in which case a district does not have to report any data at all.

Second, the state will not have access to individual level data from these benchmark assessments. Michigan [Public Act 149](#) prohibits the data from benchmark assessments from being reported to the state at the individual level. The only benchmark data available to the state is aggregate data on how Michigan students did statewide. Without the data reported

by student, Michigan cannot analyze the data to account for race, gender or poverty across schools and districts.

In order for statewide policy makers to make decisions to help remediate COVID-19 related learning loss, they need access to uniform data on an individual district and school level. This cannot be accomplished with the benchmark assessments on which Rice and Ulbrich plan to rely.

Rice and Ulbrich also believe M-STEP results will be invalid due to a disruption in the way tests are given due to COVID-19 accommodations. As two individuals with wide-ranging authority on how testing is administered, they have the ability to make testing environments as conducive to a student's needs as possible to promote validity. Furthermore, the excuse that an inability to provide adequate testing environments renders test results invalid also apply to the benchmark assessments touted by Rice and Ulbrich.

The M-STEP takes 3.5 to 6 hours for students, depending on grade level. That's a small amount of time to gather the required data needed to try and help our students recover from the learning loss they have experienced and guide policy makers on how to direct resources and adopt policies to reverse the effects COVID-19 had on education.

Rice and Ulbrich simply do not agree with state standardized testing, period. Pandemic or not, they are both on record in multiple venues decrying the existence and use of these tests. While they are entitled to their opinion, they are not entitled to break both federal and Michigan laws and refuse to provide a statewide summative assessment that will produce transparent data for stakeholders, parents and taxpayers and that will help Michigan pursue more meaningful solutions to support students and families around the state.

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