August 4, 2020

Secretary Key,

In light of the ongoing public health emergency due to COVID-19 and the consequent upheaval it has caused in every public school community across Arkansas, the Arkansas Education Association requests the state to take the necessary steps to suspend high-stakes, standardized testing for the 2020-2021 school year (including and not limited to ACT Aspire).

As we prioritize the health and safety of students, educators and the broader school community, it would be detrimental to shift our focus and our resources away from achieving this goal.

We also request the state to take the necessary steps to suspend the Teacher Evaluation and Support System (TESS) requirements for the 2020-2021 school year. During this public health emergency, fidelity to this system requires time and attention that is not feasible if we are to effectively and appropriately navigate this dynamic situation to meet the needs of our students.

In addition, the state requires Arkansas History professional development hours be completed by many educators for the 2020-2021 school year. We request this requirement be suspended so professional development time can be spent supporting educators with trauma-informed educational strategies; supporting social and emotional health; as well as, virtual and other off-site teaching and learning strategies.

Educators must have the time and other resources to determine how best to offer safety, support and educational opportunity to all of Arkansas’s public-school students during the 2020-2021 school year. Taking these actions will aid in achieving that goal.

Sincerely,

Carol B. Fleming
AEA President

Tracey-Ann Nelson
AEA Executive Director