



**Department of Education & Early Development  
Division of Administrative Services  
801 W 10<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 200  
PO Box 110500  
Juneau, Alaska 99811-0500**

## **ALASKA STATEWIDE ASSESSMENTS**

**NO OBLIGATION OF THE STATE:** This Request for Information (RFI) is an informational request and in no way creates any obligation on the part of DEED or the State of Alaska.

**REQUEST FOR INFORMATION:** The State of Alaska, Department of Education & Early Development (DEED) is requesting information from qualified vendors who can provide, administer, score, and report results for statewide summative assessments in English language arts, mathematics, and science to be administered annually beginning no later than March 28, 2017. The purpose of this RFI is to identify vendors that are interested in and can deliver assessments to meet the state specific identified needs within the timeline and cost constraints. DEED anticipates issuing a contract for 2016-2017 and will consider annual renewal options through 2020-2021. DEED estimates a budget of no more \$4,450,000 for 2016-2017. Information received from this RFI may lead to a procurement under AS 36.30 or through a procurement exemption recently passed under HB156 that becomes effective October 26, 2016. All responses become public records under AS 36.30.530.

**INTRODUCTION:** DEED's Office of Assessment & Accountability is seeking information from vendors in regards to English language arts (ELA), mathematics, and science summative assessments to be administered operationally beginning in spring 2017. Alaska is seeking a test design that is aligned with Alaska standards, that provides information in addition to an overall score (e.g., sub-scores) in each content area to the degree possible within the purpose of the assessment, that requires a reasonable amount of testing time, that can be delivered successfully to all schools and districts given Alaska's technology and Internet constraints, that is valid and reliable and can meet the requirements for peer review, and that is ready for administration no later than March 28, 2017. The state is seeking information from vendors that can deliver tests on a timeline that may be as short as four months from the time a vendor is selected.

The summative assessments must be aligned with Alaska's content standards in ELA, mathematics, and science and must meet all federal requirements for Peer Review under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act as reauthorized by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

Grades to be assessed are:

- ELA and mathematics for grades 3-8 and high school.

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- Alaska has administered tests in both grades 9 and 10 since 2002. However, DEED is seeking information from vendors about test options and costs for each grade 9, 10, and 11 separately in order to provide options for which grade(s) to test in 2017 depending on stakeholder feedback through the ESSA state plan development process.
- Science for grades 4, 8, and 10.

For ELA and mathematics, a vendor may respond with information on a summative assessment for operational administration in spring 2017 that is:

- An off-the-shelf assessment (commercially available, published, or vendor-owned), or
- An assessment developed or blended with newly created items or items from other sources that is augmented or customized for Alaska.

Alaska prefers to administer a computer-based assessment, but is open to considering a fully paper-based administration for spring 2017. DEED is interested in working with a vendor to develop options or make changes that will meet the desires of Alaska stakeholders in response to options allowed under the ESSA. Options the state may consider under ESSA include:

- tested grades in high school (grade 9, grade 10, grade 11, or a combination of up to two high school grades);
- assessment model;
- ways to measure higher order thinking skills;
- measurement of growth; and/or
- adaptivity.

For science, the state expects a vendor to use Alaska's current science items and test blueprints to provide a summative science assessment in spring 2017 and subsequent years until new science standards are adopted and a new assessment is designed. See Attachment 1, Alaska Science Test Blueprints. Note that Alaska's science standards were adopted in 2006.

**BACKGROUND:** Alaska has 54 school districts, including the state residential high school in Sitka. Alaska's districts include several configurations, including:

- large boroughs with multiple schools in the same community
  - Juneau with 15 schools
- boroughs with schools spread over a vast distance
  - Northwest Arctic Borough with schools in 11 villages over 38,000 square miles (approximately the size of Virginia)
- Single site districts with one school
  - St. Mary's, a first class city of 549 with one school serving approximately 200 students from Pre-K to grade 12
  - Pelican, a small fishing village of 110 residents with one school serving 14 students
- Regional Educational Attendance Areas (REAs) (educational area that is established in an unorganized borough of the state which do not have a tax base)
  - Lower Kuskokwim with six schools in the main village of Bethel and schools in 22 villages over 22,000 square miles

Approximately 130,000 K-12 students are enrolled statewide, with approximately 10,000 per grade. Approximately 36% of the students are enrolled in the Anchorage School District. Out of 502 schools statewide, 119 are considered small schools with a population of less than 50. Urban schools in the main population centers have a typical school configuration with students grouped by grade levels such as elementary (K-5), middle school (6-8), and high school (9-12). Over half the schools in the state are K-12

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schools that are the only school located in a village or community. In the 265 rural and remote schools, multiage classrooms have from two to nine grades taught by a single teacher. Alaska has an additional unique school type: 14 of the schools are public statewide correspondence schools. These are schools that are operated by a district but serve, via distance education, students from across the state. The majority of these students live in urban areas and many are dually enrolled in the correspondence school and a brick and mortar school (public or private). The district is responsible for arranging testing sites for these students in the nearest community, which often involves facility rental and logistics of setting up a computer lab. Some students live in extremely remote areas and need to travel to participate in testing. There is a very high transiency rate in the state, both within and between districts.

The diversity of district and school size has significant impact on the capacity of the staff to meet the multiple demands of managing all aspects of standardized testing. Many schools are not large enough to have technology specialists or additional staff to manage testing. Due to the vast geographical size of most districts it is not possible for the district office to provide onsite support to all schools. Additionally, rural Alaska schools have an average teacher turnover rate of just over 20%; it is not unusual for a school to lose all or nearly all of the staff in a single year. Responses to this RFI should include awareness of, and strategies for, mitigating these realities of Alaska's schools and districts.

### **Standards**

Alaska adopted new ELA and mathematics standards in 2012. Science grade level expectations were adopted in 2006 and will be revised in the coming years.

Alaska high school standards differ from the K-8 standards in that they are not specific to grade level. Each district develops course progressions and descriptions that best fit the students they serve. There is a vast difference in the course content and progressions across the state; additionally, many students are either a year ahead or a year behind what is considered a typical course progression. Alaska is seeking information about how a contractor will address how Alaska might construct assessments that measure academic achievement and growth in high school within these limiting factors.

Alaska's assessments must measure the depth and breadth of Alaska's standards, demonstrating a balance of content emphasis and cognitive complexity through all depths of knowledge levels. If an off-the-shelf test is proposed, the potential vendor must provide an independent alignment study, prior to selection, that has been completed by using non-contractor consultants or a non-contractor organization, that includes evidence of the alignment of forms of the assessment in terms of distribution of content (i.e. knowledge and cognitive process) across the full range of the State's grade-level academic content standards. If a custom or blended assessment is proposed to be developed, the assessment must be aligned to Alaska's standards and the contractor will be responsible for providing an independent alignment study and review after the first year of implementation. Note that Alaska has applied for a waiver from the U.S. Department of Education to waive requirements to assess the listening and speaking standards through 2016-2017, and anticipates that the waiver may be extended in future years. DEED would expect to work with a contractor to determine collaboratively if, when, and how listening and speaking will be assessed.

### **Assessment Design**

Alaska administered its former paper-based Standards-Based Assessments (SBAs) in reading, writing, and mathematics from 2005-2014. With the adoption of new ELA and mathematics standards, Alaska shifted to computer-based assessments, the Alaska Measures of Progress (AMP), in ELA and mathematics in 2015.

The ELA and mathematics assessments were built by focusing on broader skills and strategies rather than on individual standards and discrete skills. The standards were organized around the claims (big ideas),

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broad statements that outline the outcomes that demonstrate mastery of the standards. Targets were created from groups of related standards within the claims, and the test was designed to measure the targets. Information on the test design for 2015 can be found in Chapter 6, “Test Design and Development,” in the *AMP Technical Manual 2015* posted on the DEED website at <https://education.alaska.gov/akassessments/#c3gtabs-amp>. Additional content information can be found in the *Alaska Summative Assessment Frameworks* at [https://education.alaska.gov/tls/Assessments/AMPresources/Summative\\_Assessment\\_Framework.pdf](https://education.alaska.gov/tls/Assessments/AMPresources/Summative_Assessment_Framework.pdf).

The science SBA assessment was administered as a paper-based assessment from 2008 through 2015. The science test shifted to an online format using the same items and measuring the same standards in 2016. Alaska will administer science assessments on the current Alaska test blueprints using Alaska owned items for 2016-2017 and future years until the state adopts new science standards. The items are available as administered in 2015 in a PDF format. They are also available as translated into a format for computer-based delivery in 2016. These items are also in a format that is Accessible Portable Item Protocol (APIP) and Question and Test Interoperability (QTI) compliant to be transferred electronically, or can be transferred through raw code. The science test may be refreshed during the life of the contract with items that would be appropriate for use with the current science standards and possible revised science standards.

### **Assessment time and scheduling**

The computer-based ELA, mathematics, and science assessments were delivered in stages. Schools had flexibility in scheduling the order of the content assessments. Schools could schedule students to complete one or multiple stages per school day. The total estimated times for administration were 110 minutes for ELA, 90 minutes for mathematics, and 70 minutes for science. Alaska seeks assessments that can be delivered in a similar amount of time or less.

### **Accommodations and Paper-Based Assessments**

Alaska’s assessment must be built on a framework of accessibility for all students. It is important to Alaska to provide the tools and accommodations to enable all students to demonstrate what they know and can do. For a list of universal and accessibility tools and accommodations provided for the computer-based assessments, see tables 1, 2, and 3 on pages 12-13 of the *Participation Guidelines for Alaska Students in State Assessments*, available on the DEED website: <https://education.alaska.gov/tls/Assessments/accommodations/ParticipationGuidelines.pdf>.

Alaska’s assessments were computer-based in 2014-2015 and 2015-2016, but paper-based test forms were provided both as an operational form for some schools and as an accommodated form for students not able to test on the computer.

- a. Large print. Approximately 40 students required large print in spring 2015.
- b. Braille. Approximately 10 students required Braille in spring 2015.
- c. Accommodated form. 66 students required accommodated paper forms in spring 2015.
- d. Other schools. Approximately 2200 students in about a dozen schools required paper-based forms in spring 2015. Of these, some were enrolled in small schools without adequate technology. 93% were enrolled in statewide correspondence schools that require students to travel to a testing site for test administration. While the correspondence schools are gearing up for computer-based testing, there may still be a number of students who require paper-based forms depending on the technology requirements of the testing platform. In addition, other schools may choose to offer paper-based assessments in spring 2017 to minimize issues with bandwidth, connectivity, or technology challenges.

### **State law/regulations requirements related to assessments indirectly**

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There are two areas in Alaska law and regulations that are related to the implementation of a system of state assessments. It is important for interested vendors to be aware of these provisions.

DEED and the State Board of Education and Early Development have statutory authority to adopt content standards and develop performance standards for language arts and mathematics to be met by each public school student in the state. The department is also authorized to develop a comprehensive system of assessments to measure those standards. Alaska's new assessment must be aligned to Alaska's standards, which are similar, but not identical, to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). However, DEED is expressly prohibited from spending funds to implement the standards established by the CCSS Initiative as shown by the text below.

*AS 14.07.020 (18)(b) In implementing its duties under (a)(2) of this section, the department may not expend any money to implement the set of educational curriculum standards for grades kindergarten through 12 established by the Common Core Standards Initiative. ...*

All assessment and related materials developed must address Alaska's standards and may not directly reference the CCSS. Assessments must be determined to be aligned to Alaska's standards. Further information on the Alaska standards, and the differences from the CCSS, can be found on DEED's website at

[https://education.alaska.gov/akstandards/standards/differences\\_between\\_cc\\_and\\_ak\\_standards.pdf](https://education.alaska.gov/akstandards/standards/differences_between_cc_and_ak_standards.pdf).

Additionally, Alaska has laws that govern the local control of districts over curriculum. Local district school boards have full responsibility to provide the educational program for the schools in their district and for selecting textbooks and instructional materials to implement the chosen curriculum. DEED does not have authority to determine the scope and sequence of district curriculum.

### **Technology**

DEED is committed to continuing with a computer-based assessment for the long term. However, Alaska faces challenges with technology that require expertise and creative problem solving. Districts across the state have widely varying access to both Internet connectivity and expertise to establish and maintain school technology systems. Connectivity capacity ranges from satellite connections with significant delays and intermittent availability to high speed fiber optics that rival cities in the lower 48 states. Several districts have dedicated experienced IT teams, while many have little or no IT on-site support; DEED does not have staff dedicated to technology support for districts. Many districts require a local caching server option or another solution for unpredictable or low bandwidth. Many districts also require on-demand technical support for solving simple and complex technology issues. Alaska is seeking information from interested vendors that demonstrates an understanding of specific issues facing Alaska with computer-based assessment and offers multiple, evidence-based solutions that include intensive support for district staff.

The following technical specifications were used by Alaska during the 2015-2016 assessments. The devices must have a minimum 9.5 inch diagonal screen with a minimum resolution of 1024 x 768.

- Desktops and laptops running Windows 7, 8.1, or 10
- Desktops and laptops running OS X 10.10 or 10.11
- Chromebooks (running Chrome OS)
- iPads running iOS 9

The minimum and recommended bandwidth that was required for the 2016 ELA and mathematics assessments was:

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- Without a local caching server – 3 MBps (384 kBps) minimum, 5 MBps recommended
- With local caching server – 1 MBps minimum, 5 MBps recommended

The browsers that supported the 2015-2016 assessments were:

- Firefox 38.7.1 or above
- Safari 9.0.3 or above
- Internet Explorer 11
- Chrome 35 and above

It is very important to Alaska that a vendor can provide information on how redundancy is built into the system and what contingency and disaster recovery plans would be in place. It is also important to the state to have information about decreasing the likelihood of technology test irregularities and the capability of a system to collect data at item, student, and aggregate levels to analyze the impacts of the technology irregularities or interruptions.

### **Data Management**

Alaska does not have a statewide student information system. Instead, each district uses one of a number of commercially available student information systems. Approximately two-thirds of the state's 54 districts use PowerSchool. It is important to note that the state's largest school district does not use PowerSchool. Alaska does issue a unique Alaska Student Identification (AKSID) number to each student to ensure accurate identification and matching with test results, and a vendor would be expected to have processes to validate the correct AKSID for each student's test record.

The lack of a statewide student information system has two important consequences for Alaska's required statewide assessments. First, DEED must collect student demographic information in a separate data collection that is administered concurrently with spring testing. Second, there must be flexibility in the assessment contractor's system to administer a computer-based assessment to account for the manual uploading and maintenance of student data from 54 school districts.

DEED provides districts with access to secure student-level assessment results in an online tool called Data Interaction for Alaska Student Assessments (DIASA), which is currently supported by a subcontractor. Using DIASA, districts have easy access to results from the current general and alternate assessments, the English language proficiency assessment, and historical assessments that are no longer administered. DIASA also includes a macro that, with the click of a button, produces output used to populate districts' federally mandated report cards. Besides DIASA, districts have had access to student-level results through a comprehensive data file produced by the assessment vendor.

### **Reports**

Alaska has provided two printed copies of individual student score reports to schools. Previous assessment contractors have produced summary and detail school and district assessment reports. These reports include the percentage of students in each of four levels of achievement by content area and grade level. Due to the small size of Alaska's student population – including at the school, grade, and subgroup levels – suppression rules must often be applied to assessment results to prevent the linking of an assessment result to a specific student. Assessment results are never reported when fewer than five students at a school complete an assessment. Also, exact counts and percentages are not reported when students are distributed in certain ways among achievement levels. In these cases, DEED reports percentage ranges (e.g. 60 percent or more). The department's public reporting protocol is available at <https://education.alaska.gov/tls/Assessments/Results.html>.

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Expectations for the type of information on the state summative assessment reports have increased over the last several years by both educators and parents. The overall response to the reports from the first administration in spring 2015 of the AMP computer-based assessments in ELA and mathematics was negative due to the lack of specific information and the look and feel of the reports. The response from educators was that the reports had too much text and there was a lack of information on student achievement at a sub-score level that could help parents understand how their students performed on the content and that could help teachers improve instruction for students. Based on these concerns, DEED worked with the contractor to design new reports for the 2016 ELA and mathematics assessments so that information could be provided at a deeper sub-score level. See Attachment 2, Alaska Student Report Categories for 2016, for the level of information that was planned to be reported. Due the cancellation of the 2016 Alaska assessments, no data was able to be reported for the 2016 assessments and these new report designs were not used.

The same reporting scale, performance levels, sub-scores and report design will continue to be used for science in future years until new science standards are adopted and a new assessment is designed to measure those standards. See Attachment 3, Science Report Designs for 2015 Assessments.

### **Training and support**

It is important to Alaska that ancillary support materials such as test administration documents, interpretive guides, training materials, practice tests, etc. are of high quality and that a vendor have an editorial review and revision process that includes opportunities for input by DEED staff. It is important to Alaska that support be provided directly by a vendor through a help-desk with extended hours during the test administration window. DEED is also seeking information from vendors that can provide not only web-based training but also on-site training (up to two days) in Anchorage for district test coordinators in late January or early February annually, including travel and per diem costs for approximately 60 participants.

**PRIOR EXPERIENCE:** DEED is seeking information from vendors with the following minimum prior experience requirements:

- a) Vendor must provide evidence of successful implementation of at least three large-scale assessment contracts that have employed approaches similar to those proposed by the vendor within the last ten years.
- b) Vendor's Project Director must have demonstrated previous experience with managing a large, customized assessment project similar in scope and nature to the Alaska assessment system.

**RESPONSE INFORMATION:** Interested vendors are invited to submit a letter of interest that includes a response to the following priorities. Provide succinct summary responses to each item and identify any constraints or efficiencies for DEED consideration. Responses are limited to 30 pages using a 12-point font with 1-inch margins.

### **1. ELA and mathematics tests for spring 2017**

Describe how you would address the summative testing requirements for ELA and mathematics in spring 2017, while highlighting tools and accommodations that ensure accessibility for all students. DEED prefers to have a computer-based assessment; describe if and how you would meet this preference in spring 2017.

### **2. Science assessments for spring 2017**

Describe how you would address the testing requirements for science in spring 2017, while highlighting tools and accommodations that ensure accessibility for all students. DEED prefers to have a computer-based assessment, describe how you would meet this preference.

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3. **Alignment with Alaska standards**

Describe how the proposed assessments are aligned to the Alaska standards and how that alignment would be demonstrated.

4. **Scoring & Reporting**

Describe how any constructed-response items will be scored, what reports will be able to be provided, the level of information that will be provided on the reports, and the timeline and delivery method of the reports.

5. **Student demographic, participation and enrollment data**

Describe how student enrollment data would be submitted by districts and how this will be incorporated and validated with the demographic and participation data collected by DEED, while highlighting how student confidentiality is maintained.

6. **Computer-based test technical requirements**

Describe how you will address DEED's preference for a computer-based assessment given the requirements and circumstances of technology and geography in Alaska.

7. **Online assessment challenges and remedies**

Describe how you will be able to respond to and resolve interruptions and technology issues in online testing.

8. **Paper-based test administration**

If you cannot offer a computer-based assessment, describe how your paper-based assessment will meet the needs of Alaska. If you are describing a computer-based assessment, describe how you will use paper-based assessments in the cases where a computer-based assessment is not practical or feasible.

9. **Training, support, and test security**

Describe what training and support you will provide to school personnel throughout school year and during the assessment administration. Describe your process for maintaining test security for both computer-based and paper-based assessments.

10. **Project management and planning**

Describe a broad overview of how you will manage the project, including planning and general assignment of personnel.

11. **Future test design & development**

Describe how you will collaborate with DEED for developing, improving, and adapting assessments after spring 2017.

12. **Timeline**

Describe in general terms how you would be able to meet the timeline for providing assessments for Alaska no later than March 28, 2017 given a start date as late as December 1, 2016.

13. **Prior Experience**

Describe your experience providing statewide assessments.

14. **Cost**

Can you reasonably provide an assessment for ELA and math in grades 3-10 and science in grades 4, 8, and 10 within the budget addressed on page 1 of this RFI? Please do not include any actual costs or detailed budget information. .

**IMPORTANT NOTICE:** This RFI does not constitute nor guarantee that the State will proceed with a formal solicitation for the requested services. The State is not responsible for any costs associated with the preparation of any response to this request. In addition, the State reserves the right to negotiate only with vendors who submit letters of interest.

**RESPONSE DEADLINE:** Responses must be received electronically by the Procurement Officer no later than 4:00 P.M. AKDT (Alaska Daylight Time) on **Wednesday, September 14, 2016**. Responses can be submitted via email to [Robert.Roys@alaska.gov](mailto:Robert.Roys@alaska.gov).



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Faxed responses are not allowed.

Please Note: The **maximum** size of a single email (including all text and attachments) that can be received by the state is **20 mb (megabytes)**. If the email containing the response exceeds this size, the response must be sent in multiple emails that are each less than 20 megabytes.

It is the responsibility of the interested party to follow-up with the individual listed above to ensure your response was received prior to the time and date specified.

**POINT OF CONTACT:** Questions concerning this request must be directed to Rob Roys, Procurement Officer, Division of Administrative Services, via email at [Robert.Roys@alaska.gov](mailto:Robert.Roys@alaska.gov).