

The Facts about Alaska's New Comprehensive Assessments

Toward preparing students to be college, career, and culturally ready graduates

Alaska assessments are changing in order to accurately assess student growth and student mastery of the updated Alaska English Language Arts and Mathematics Standards. The new assessments will be administered for the first time in spring 2015. The Alaska Department of Education & Early Development has selected the Achievement & Assessment Institute (AAI) of Kansas to develop and administer assessments for Alaska's public schools. AAI will provide summative and interim assessments for grades 3-10 that are aligned to the Alaska English Language Arts and Mathematics Standards, adopted in 2012. AAI will provide custom computer-based assessments, with a paper/pencil format for schools that are not ready to administer online tests. The new assessment is called Alaska Measures of Progress, or AMP.



These tests tell us how well Alaskan students, schools, and districts are meeting the Alaska English language arts and mathematics standards. State law and the federal school accountability requirements of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act require statewide assessments. Test scores will be used in school and district accountability (Alaska School Performance Index star ratings and Annual Measureable Objectives) and by districts for their educator evaluation systems. Alaska will discontinue the current assessment, the Standards Based Assessments (SBAs). The SBAs assess our former standards, the Alaska Grade Level Expectations. They will be administered for the last time in April 2014.

The science assessment is not part of this new contract. The science test, which is paper/pencil, will be administered to grades 4, 8, and 10 March 30-April 10, 2015.

The department will provide professional learning opportunities for school and district staff. Information about the new assessments will be provided at events and conferences; specific training will be provided for district test coordinators and technology coordinators. Online tutorials and webinars will be available for educators.

The most effective way to prepare students for the new assessments is to ensure that the Alaska English Language Arts and Mathematics Standards are being implemented. Technology Practice Tests for students will be available in September 2014.

Alaskan educators from all districts will be invited to contribute to the development of the assessment through participation on the following committees:

- **Passage Writing Workshops:** these workshops will teach educators how to write passages for assessment purposes. Passages created during the workshop may be used on AMP.
- **Item Content Reviews:** These committees review items for alignment, cognitive complexity, clarity, language grade-level appropriateness, and accessibility.
- **Item Bias and Sensitivity Review:** These committees ensure that assessment materials are appropriate and accessible for all students, culturally sensitive and free from bias, and respectfully representative of all people. This includes reviewing newly developed items, proposed English language arts passages, and field-tested items.
- **Achievement Level Descriptors:** These committees review the statements of performance at a given achievement level for each grade level.
- **Standard Setting:** These committees receive intensive training and assist in recommending cut scores for achievement levels.

Alaska is transitioning to computer-based assessments. Computer-based assessments have multiple benefits. Students interact with computer-based assessments, and for many students this means they are more engaged. Computer-based assessment questions are enhanced with technology features that are not possible in a paper test, such as manipulating the graphics or listening to a story. Student results for the interim assessments are available for teachers' immediate use in determining how best to support students. Districts will no longer have to track, ship, and manage hundreds of paper tests and answer booklets.

Computer-based assessments also allow for computer-adaptive testing. Computer-adaptive tests adjust the difficulty of questions to a student's responses and provide greater score precision. For example, if a student performs well on a set of questions with intermediate difficulty, she will be presented with a more challenging set. Likewise, if the student performs poorly, she is presented with a set of simpler items.

Most districts have the computers needed to administer the new assessment. The test delivery engine is supported on desktops (Windows, Mac & Linux), laptops, and tablets. The delivery engine has a local caching system (LCS), which Alaska schools can download and install within a school's network. The servers will reduce bandwidth usage and allow schools to test more students concurrently. The servers are supported on Windows, Mac, and Linux operating systems.

Types of Assessments

Summative Assessment: designed to provide information regarding the level of student, school, or program success at an end point in time. Summative tests are administered after the conclusion of instruction. The results are used to fulfill summative functions, such as to: 1) reach an evaluative judgment about the effectiveness of a recently concluded educational program; 2) arrive at an inference about a student's mastery of the curricular aims sought during an in-class instructional sequence; 3) determine a grade for a course; or 4) meet local, state, and federal accountability requirements. Assessments referred

to as summative can range from large-scale assessment systems, such as the annual assessments administered across the state, to district-wide assessment systems or tests, to classroom summative tests created by teachers. These tests are also called "outcome assessments."

Interim Assessment: typically administered periodically throughout the school year to fulfill one or more of the following functions: 1) predictive (identifying students' readiness for success on a later high-stakes tests); 2) evaluative (to appraise ongoing educational programs); and 3) instructional (to supply teachers with individual student performance data). The tests are also called "benchmark," "interim benchmark," or "common."

Universal Screening Assessments: periodically conducted, usually two or three times during a school year, to identify students who may be at risk, to monitor student progress, or to predict students' likelihood of success on meeting or exceeding curricular benchmarks. Universal screening tests are typically brief and conducted with all students at a particular grade level. They focus on target skills (for example, phonological awareness) that are highly predictive of future outcomes. These assessments are used along with other information to identify students who need more frequent or intensive opportunities to learn a skill.

Formative assessment: a process used by teachers and students during instruction that provides feedback to adjust ongoing teaching and learning to improve students' achievement of intended instructional outcomes. The critical features of effective formative assessment include: 1) clearly identified learning goals and criteria for success; 2) clearly articulated sub-goals and learning progressions; 3) evidence of learning elicited during instruction; 4) descriptive feedback provided to students and self; and 5) peer-assessment. *Definitions from "Distinguishing Formative Assessment from Other Educational Assessment Labels" CCSSO Formative Assessment for Students and Teachers (FAST) State Collaborative, 2012*

