

Mike Hanley
Commissioner

P.O. Box 110500
Juneau, AK 99811-0500
education.alaska.gov



Eric Fry
Information Officer
907.465.2851
cell: 907.321.5564
eric.fry@alaska.gov

Press Release

COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Jan.14, 2014

Alaska selects new assessment contractor *State withdraws from Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium*

REVISED TO REFLECT THAT TESTS WILL BE FOR GRADES 3-10

JUNEAU -- 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.

The assessments provide parents, students, and educators with information about student achievement in reading, writing, and mathematics – subjects that are fundamental in daily life, the workplace, K-12 schools, the military, apprenticeships, technical schools, and colleges.

Assessment results also help the state and school districts decide where to place resources for struggling students.

The five-year contract with AAI will cost approximately \$5 million per year. Following Alaska's notice of intent to award a contract, other bidders have 10 calendar days, less holidays, to protest the award.

Alaska has withdrawn from the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, a federally funded consortium of states that is developing assessments similar to the Common Core State Standards.

AAI will provide custom assessments for grades 3-10 that are aligned to the new Alaska English language arts and mathematics standards, adopted by the state in 2012. The assessments that are given toward the end of the school year, called summative, will first be administered in spring 2015.

Additionally, school districts will have the option, beginning in fall 2015, to administer short classroom assessments during the school year to check on student progress and help shape instruction.

A large, faint watermark logo is visible in the background, featuring a hand holding a torch and the text "ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION & EARLY DEVELOPMENT".

EDUCATION
& EARLY DEVELOPMENT

AAI will provide custom computer-based assessments, with a paper/pencil format for schools that are not ready to administer online tests.

The summative assessments will be implemented in two phases:

- Phase 1 (spring 2015 and spring 2016): AAI will develop transitional, fixed-form computer-based assessments to introduce educators and students to assessment of the Alaska standards in a computer-based method.
- Phase 2 (spring 2017 through spring 2020): AAI will administer computer-adaptive assessments with custom-developed items.

Computer-adaptive assessments provide more accurate scores for all students across the full range of achievement. Based on student responses, the computer program adjusts the difficulty of questions throughout the assessment. For example, a student who answers a question correctly will receive a more challenging item, and an incorrect answer will generate an easier question. By adapting to the student as the assessment is taking place, these assessments present an individually tailored set of questions to each student and can quickly identify which skills students have mastered, helping teachers adjust instruction to each student's needs.

The optional interim assessment in grades 3-10 will provide immediate feedback for teachers at the school and classroom level. The interim assessments will be online and computer adaptive.

The AAI delivers assessments using a web-based interface and student-friendly, intuitive graphics. AAI's assessment-delivery systems have been used in Kansas since 2005, in states participating in the Career Pathways Assessment System, and for the Dynamic Learning Maps Alternate Assessment Consortium. AAI annually delivers more than 1.8 million summative assessments to students.

AAI uses a local caching system, which schools can download and install within a school's network. This reduces bandwidth usage, prevents students from being interrupted when bandwidth fluctuates, and allows schools to test more students concurrently. The system is supported on multiple operating systems common in Alaska, and can be used on desktops, laptops, and tablets.

As is the case now with Alaska's student assessments, the federal government will not have access to personally identifiable data about students. Alaska ensures that data files are protected by the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act and Alaska's privacy laws. All portals holding student-level data are password-protected and have firewall protection. Data files use advanced encryption to assure that intercepted data cannot be compromised.

Alaskan educators will participate in reviewing the assessments for bias and cultural sensitivity, and will participate in setting the scoring thresholds for levels of achievement.

Other features:

- In 2014-2015, AAI will provide non-adaptive online practice tests to let students and educators become familiar with the way the assessments are delivered and the way questions are presented.
- The summative and interim assessments will be on the same reporting scale to facilitate interpretation of test results.
- The system is built with an access-for-all approach, adapting to individual student needs. A large array of tools, including magnification, highlighters, and reference materials will be available to students. Tools, such as American Sign Language translations and talking calculators, can be used through students' Personal Needs and Preferences Profiles.
- AAI is hiring a project liaison, who will be located in Alaska. Multiple training opportunities for educators will be available in person and online.
- AAI's delivery system will be used for summative and interim assessments. Teachers, test administrators, test coordinators, and other school and district staff will use the same system, features, and interface for all aspects of the assessment system (enrolling students, ordering materials, assessing, data and reports).
- AAI is leading the Dynamic Learning Maps Consortium's effort to develop an alternate assessment for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. Alaska is a member of the consortium.

Data Recognition Corporation, the state's assessment contractor since 2005, will administer the final year of the current Standards Based Assessments in April 2014. DRC will administer the Alaska High School Qualifying Exam through fall 2015.

For more information, contact Erik McCormick, EED Director of Assessment, Accountability, and Information Management, at 907-465-8686 or erik.mccormick@alaska.gov

###

