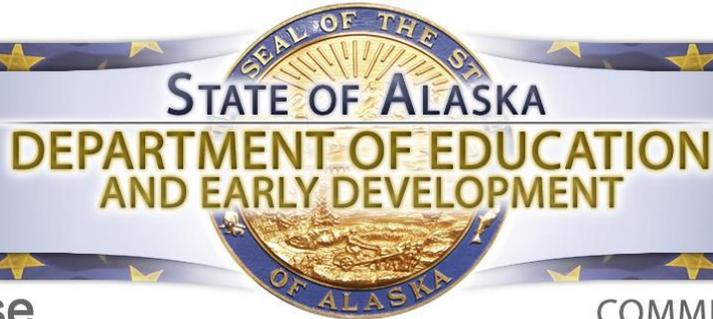


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Press Release

COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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State Seeks Waiver from Assessments for Past School Year

JUNEAU -- Alaska is asking the U.S. Department of Education to waive the federal requirement to administer English language arts, mathematics, and science assessments during the 2015-2016 school year, which recently ended. Because of significant technical problems with administering the computer-based tests, the state was not able to complete the assessments.

At 10:30 a.m. Alaska time on March 29, the first day of testing, construction workers severed a fiber optic cable at the University of Kansas, where Alaska's testing provider is based, shutting down Internet service at the university and interrupting the computer-based tests for Alaska students until March 31. After resuming testing on March 31, the system crashed two more times that morning.

Even before the cable was cut, and after it was repaired, schools reported multiple technology errors that affected students, such as blank screens, no sound, questions out of sequence, and answers not being saved. Many students had their testing interrupted, had to answer the same question more than once, or had a test that did not work as designed.

On April 1, the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development canceled further testing, based on concerns that technical disruptions had rendered the affected tests invalid. Canceled were the Alaska Measures of Progress (grades 3-10), the Alaska science tests (grades 4, 8, and 10), and the Dynamic Learning Maps (grades 3-10) for students with severe cognitive disabilities.

Alaska did not resume testing later in the school year because there was insufficient evidence that students would have a high probability of successful testing.

As a result, Alaska must seek a waiver, for the 2015-2016 school year, from federal requirements to annually measure students' achievement in grades 3-8 and at least once in high school on language arts and mathematics assessments, and measure students' achievement in grades 4, 8, and 10 on science assessments.

Because testing was interrupted during its first week, only a small percentage of students completed an assessment. In addition, the state has substantial doubt about whether

students' answers represent credible data because districts reported that many students experienced interruptions and other test administration problems, and often were distracted, frustrated, or no longer took the test seriously.

As a result, Alaska also is requesting a waiver, for the 2015-2016 school year, from federal requirements to report achievement data on its state and local report cards, and to submit data for the annual State Report to the U.S. Secretary of Education.

Alaska is seeking a new assessment system for English language arts, mathematics, and science to begin in the 2016-2017 school year, and expects to release a request for proposals soon.

The public may submit comment on the waiver request until July 7 at 5:00 p.m. to eric.fry@alaska.gov.

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