

# The Facts about Alaska's New Balanced Assessments

*Ensuring an Excellent Education for Every Student Every Day*

*June 2021*

**Alaska's new innovative assessment provides a balanced system aimed at measuring student performance throughout the year and showing academic growth within and across years.**

Alaska Department of Education & Early Development (DEED) has selected NWEA to develop and administer an innovative assessment that will be administered for the first time in the 2021-2022 school year. During year one, NWEA will provide MAP Growth, an interim assessment that many districts are already familiar with, in the fall, winter, and spring. In spring 2022, NWEA will provide the spring summative assessment, as well. After year one, the spring summative and spring interim assessments will be linked, providing one score that meets both instructional and growth measurement needs as well as federal reporting requirements. Assessments aligned to the Alaska English Language Arts and Mathematics Standards will be provided for grades 3-9.

**Alaska's innovative assessment system will streamline testing and maximize efficiency.** The connected system provides a more seamless experience between the interim and summative assessments for students and educators and, once operational, reduces testing events. The fall and winter MAP Growth assessments assess student performance using grade-independent indicators of student learning level (RIT scores) and project performance on the spring summative assessment. The spring summative assessment measures student performance relative to Alaska's grade-level standards and produces not only summative proficiency scores for accountability purposes but also RIT scores, so districts can measure fall-to-spring growth without administering a separate MAP Growth assessment in the spring.

**Alaska's innovative assessment system will increase coherence across interim and summative assessments so educators can drive students toward consistent, challenging learning targets.** The common information related to both grade-independent and grade-level achievement across each assessment creates cohesion and focus across the system that supports educators in both meeting students where they are and moving them to and beyond grade-level proficiency.

**Alaska's innovative assessment system will give educators, students, and parents timely, meaningful insights on student strengths and areas of need.** The data will inform the teaching and learning process and help to provide all students the opportunity to reach their highest academic potential.

- o The RIT score provided by each assessment helps educators understand what students know and are ready to learn next, regardless of grade level, and enables longitudinal measurement of each student's growth from fall to spring and across grades.
- o Normative data from the RIT score allows comparisons of student performance relative to peers nationwide (i.e. growth and achievement percentiles).

As MAP Growth will be provided by DEED in the fall of 2021, DEED will begin work with districts to prepare for fall testing soon.

**These tests tell us how well Alaskan students, schools, and districts are meeting the Alaska English language arts and mathematics standards.** The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) requires states to administer a summative assessment based on the adopted English language arts and mathematics standards. Assessment scores will be used as one indicator in determining school designations in Alaska's accountability system, the System for School Success. Alaska will discontinue the current assessment, the Performance Evaluation for Alaska Schools (PEAKS) for assessment of ELA and Math.

**PEAKS Science Assessment will continue as the Alaska assessment of science standards for grades 5, 8, and 10.**

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

In addition, NWEA will develop engaging, empowering professional learning workshops customized to support Alaska's educators and school leaders in deepening understanding of data-informed decision-making and in expanding effective assessment literacy and formative instructional practices.

**Alaska is transitioning to computer-based assessments.** Computer-based assessments have multiple benefits. Computer-based assessment questions are enhanced with technology features that are not possible in a paper assessment, resulting in greater student engagement. Student results for the interim assessments are available for teachers' immediate use in determining how best to support students, meaning the assessment data can immediately impact the teaching and learning cycle. For the summative assessment, districts will no longer have to track, ship, and manage hundreds of paper test booklets and answer documents.

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 and (Windows, Mac, and Linux), laptops (Windows, Chromebooks, Mac, and Linux), and tablets (Windows and iPads). The test platform offers multiple capabilities to help school districts overcome low-bandwidth and intermittent connectivity issues, including utilizing a content distribution network (CDN) and multi-layer caching capabilities.