FAQs about Alaska's Summative Assessments

Why does Alaska give statewide summative assessments?
First, we want to be able to inform parents, educators, policy makers, the community, and businesses how our schools and districts are performing. Second, the information from the assessments can be used to help determine school improvement efforts. Third, we want to ensure there is equity in education for all students. The mission of the Alaska State Board of Education & Early Development is to provide an excellent education to every student every day.

What are summative assessments?
A summative assessment is given at the end of an instructional period to measure how well students have learned the content. These statewide summative assessments in English language arts, mathematics, and science are given close to the end of the school year.

When are the assessments given to students?
The summative assessments, called the Performance Evaluation for Alaska's Schools, or PEAKS, and the Alaska Science Assessment are administered each spring. A test window calendar is available on the PEAKS webpage (https://education.alaska.gov/assessments/peaks).

How are Alaska educators involved in developing the assessments?
Alaska educators have been involved in the development of the PEAKS achievement level descriptors and the process called standards setting to determine the scores for the ELA and mathematics assessments. As early as the spring of 2019, educators will be invited to participate in the review and development of new Alaska owned items.

What grades participate in the assessments?
The PEAKS assessments are administered to all students in grades 3-9 in English language arts and mathematics. The Alaska Science Assessment is administered to students in grades 4, 8, and 10.

I am a teacher. How can I prepare my students for the assessments? Can students study for the test?
The most effective way to prepare students for the assessments is to ensure that the Alaska English Language Arts and Mathematics Standards are being utilized in your instruction. Materials available on the DEED website include information regarding the format of the standards, resources that support effective strategies, as well as resources that help educators evaluate instructional materials. Student preparation resources are also available for educators to assist students in becoming familiar with the format of the assessments: both computer-based and paper-based. For more information, please visit the PEAKS and Alaska Science Student Preparation webpage (https://education.alaska.gov/assessments/peaks/StudentPreparation).

I am a parent. How can I support my student in performing well on the assessments?
Be sure that your student has nourishment and a good night's sleep before the tests. Encourage your student to do his or her best on the test, but to understand that it will not affect his or her grades in the classroom.

What types of questions do the assessments have?
The summative tests will include a variety of item types, including traditional multiple choice, non-traditional multiple choice formats such a "choose all that apply," technology-enhanced and technology-enabled items such as plotting points on a graph or number line, selecting a response from a drop-down list, items with drag and drop functionality, or text-dependent analysis.

Do students with disabilities and students who are English learners take this assessment?

Yes. This test is designed using a process called "universal design." The goal of universal design is to maximize student access and allow students to demonstrate their understanding of the content. Specific accommodations for students with disabilities and students who are English language learners will be available. *A testing accommodation is a change made to ensure that information obtained from a test is an accurate reflection of what the test is intended to measure, rather than a measure of the student's disability.*

What test-taking tools and accommodations are allowed on the assessments?
There are many universal features that are provided on the computer-based assessment, such as highlighting, magnification, color overlay, color contrast, masking, etc., that are available to all students. Text-to-Speech (TTS) is an accommodation available to students with documented need. TTS is embedded in the test platform and allows students to start, stop, and replay computer audio what a student sees on the.

Accommodations available for students taking the paper-based are the same as for the computer-based assessment but are delivered in an alternate format. For instance, students needing text-to-speech assistance have audio CDs or a human read aloud to read questions and answer choices is available.

More information about test taking tools and allowable accommodations is available on the DEED's accommodations webpage (https://education.alaska.gov/assessments/accommodations).

Who is DRC? Where are they located? What experience do they have in administering statewide assessments?
Data Recognition Corporation (DRC) is located in Maple Grove, Minnesota. DRC currently works with ten states, including Alaska, and has proven experience in delivering online assessments. DRC is also the current test vendor for the WIDA consortium and their assessment, ACCESS for ELLs, which includes 39 states, territories, and education agencies.

DRC and DEED previously worked together in a positive and collaborative partnership to administer the Standards Based Assessments (SBAs) from 2005 – 2015.

What kind of computers are used by students for the computer-based assessments?
The test delivery engine is supported on desktops (Windows, Mac & Linux), laptops, and tablets.

What if my school isn't ready to do a computer-based assessment? What if my school or district does not have the infrastructure to support computerized testing?
Districts and schools can choose to administer either the computer-based assessment or the paper-based assessment.

DRC also provides technology support to districts. DRC has developed an assessment engine that is Internet-based so that schools do not need to constantly download new software. Student responses are stored instantly, which negates the need to retake the test if there is a power outage or other disruption. DRC also provides for, and recommends, the use of a Central Office Service Device (COS), which Alaska schools can download and install within a school's network. Using COS will reduce bandwidth usage when internet connectivity is limited and allow schools to test more students concurrently. The COS is supported on Windows, Mac, and Linux OS versions.

How can I find out more information about the PEAKS and Alaska Science assessments?
There are ample resources for educators, parents, and students on the PEAKS webpage (https://education.alaska.gov/assessments/peaks). This webpage is regularly updated throughout the year.