

Frequently Asked Questions

New Alaska Assessments

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 by Alaska in 2012. AAI will provide custom computer-based assessments, with a paper/pencil format for schools that are not ready to administer computer-based tests. The new assessment is called Alaska Measures of Progress, or AMP.

Why do we give a statewide assessment?

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. The scores from these tests 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. Schools with low star ratings receive additional resources and support.

Why is Alaska getting new assessments?

Alaska assessments are changing in order to accurately assess student mastery of the updated Alaska English Language Arts and Mathematics Standards. The state's current Standards Based Assessments assess our former standards, the Alaska Grade Level Expectations.

When will the new assessment first be given to students?

The new summative assessment will be administered for the first time in spring 2015. The test window calendar is available at <http://education.alaska.gov/akassessments/#c3gtabs-amp>

What happens to the current assessments for reading, writing and math?

The current Standards Based Assessments will be administered for the final time in spring 2014. The items developed for the tests are owned by Alaska. Some of the items will be aligned to our updated standards and used in the new assessments.

Will students still take the High School Graduation Qualifying Exam (HSGQE)?

No. With the signing of House Bill 278 into law, the HSGQE is repealed. It is replaced with requirement for students to take a college and career ready assessment. Alaska has chosen the following three assessments to meet this requirement: the ACT, SAT, and WorkKeys. Students must take one of these three college and career ready assessments to receive a high school diploma. EED will pay for the administration of one assessment per student in grade 11; if the student was unable to take the assessment in grade 11 they may take it in grade 12. EED is currently determining the best course of action to ensure that all students have opportunity to take the assessment of their choice.

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



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What support will the department provide to schools and districts to assist with the transition to new assessments?

The department will provide professional learning opportunities for school and district staff at events and conferences over the next year. In addition, specific training will be provided for district test coordinators and technology coordinators. Online tutorials and webinars will be available for educators.

How will Alaskan educators be involved in developing the new assessments?

Alaskan educators from all districts will be invited to participate in the following committees to develop blueprints, review passages, and check for bias and sensitivity.

What grades will participate in the new assessments?

The proposal from AAI provides a summative assessment for students in grades 3-10 in English language arts and mathematics each spring starting in 2015. The interim assessment, which is optional for school districts, will be available for use in grades 3-10 starting in fall 2015.

How can I prepare my students for the new assessments? Can students study for the test?

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. Practice tests for students will be available in fall 2014. Most students will take the assessment on a computer. Students should have opportunities to use computers in instructional activities so they are familiar with using a keyboard and mouse, and with reading text on a screen.

How long will the test take to administer?

The test will not be timed. Because the test is currently being developed, it is not possible to say with certainty how long it will be. However, we estimate that it will take most students between 90-120 minutes.

Will students with disabilities 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.* Students with significant cognitive disabilities (less than 2% of the student population) will participate in the Alternate Assessment which is administered using the same online test platform.

Will the accommodations that are allowed be different on the new test?

Many features that have been accommodations in the past, such as highlighting, will be available to all students. The department will be revising the Accommodations Manual and Participation Guidelines, in the summer of 2014. A complete list of accessibility features and accommodations will be available in the fall of 2014.

Why is Alaska giving a computer-based assessment?

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.

How does a computer-based assessment work?

AAI's interactive testing engine, KITE, uses a test delivery engine that is accessed via the KITE Client, a customized version of Firefox. Students log in, and the test launches in kiosk mode, which prevents students from accessing unauthorized content or software while taking the secure assessments.

What kind of computers can be used for the new assessment?

The test delivery engine is supported on desktops (Windows, Mac & Linux), laptops, and tablets. Additionally, the test delivery engine has a Local Caching System (LCS), which Alaska schools can download and install within a school's network. Using LCS will reduce bandwidth usage and allow schools to test more students concurrently. The LCS is supported on Windows, Mac, and Linux OS versions. More information on the technology requirements are found at <http://akassessments.org/kite>.

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?

A paper/pencil format will be available for schools that are not yet technologically ready for computer-based test delivery. EED and AAI will provide technology support to districts. A Waiver from Computer-based Administration of AMP is available to schools that need to temporarily use the paper/pencil test.

AAI has developed an assessment engine that is Internet-based so that schools do not need to constantly download new software and so student responses are stored instantly, saving them from having to retake the test if there is a power outage or other disruption. AAI also provides for, and recommends the use of, a Local Caching System. An LCS is run on a regular personal computer that sits on a school or district network and makes testing possible even if Internet connectivity is poor, even out for days at a time.

Will the tests be computer-adaptive right away?

No. The summative assessment will be implemented in two phases.

- In the first phase (2015-2016), students will take a transitional, computer-based assessment that is a fixed-form (all students answer the same questions). This will provide students and educators the opportunity to become familiar with an assessment of the new content standards, the new test delivery mode, and new ways of interacting with technology-enhanced test items.
- In the second phase (spring 2017), the test will be computer-adaptive (adjust the level of difficulty of the questions to a student's responses).

What types of questions will the new assessments have?

The summative tests will include a variety of item types, including traditional multiple choice, non-traditional multiple choice formats such as "choose all that apply," technology-enhanced and technology-enabled items, and constructed response items, which may include short or extended responses or "show your work" responses in mathematics.

The interim assessments (optional) will be multiple-choice, computer-adaptive tests. This allows for immediate access to results for teachers.

What is the difference between a summative assessment, an interim assessment, a screening assessment, a benchmark assessment, and a formative assessment?

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 subgoals 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

What is AAI?

AAI is the Achievement and Assessment Institute, the contractor selected to create Alaska’s new assessment. From its website, <http://aai.ku.edu>:

AAI’s main mission is to improve the performance of students, adults, and public agencies throughout local, state, and national communities. AAI and its centers partner with numerous agencies whose goals are to improve the lives of children and adults through academics, employment, career advancement, or building healthy environments, as a well as to enhance the capacity of organizations that help children, adults, and communities succeed.

Where is AAI located?

AAI is on the University of Kansas main campus in Lawrence.

What experience does AAI have in comprehensive statewide assessments?

AAI has been developing and delivering the state assessment for Kansas for over 30 years, and has been delivering Kansas’ assessments online since 2005. During the 2012-2013 school year, AAI delivered more than 1.8 million summative tests online. Additionally, AAI has experience working with multiple state departments of education with the DLM Alternate Assessment Consortium (currently 17 states) and the Career Pathways Assessment System (currently three states).

How can I find out more information about the new Alaska assessment?

The department is developing resources and tools for educators, parents, and students. We will be regularly updating this webpage: <http://education.alaska.gov/akassessments/>. Additional information about the new assessment can be found at the www.akassessments.org website hosted by AAI.

