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Press Release

COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

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DEED selects Data Recognition Corp. as vendor for English language arts, math, and science assessments

The Alaska Department of Education and Early Development has selected Data Recognition Corp. (DRC) as its vendor for statewide student assessments in English language arts, math, and science.

The assessments from DRC will first be administered in spring 2017. Students will take the English language arts and math assessments in grades 3 to 10, and the science assessments in grades 4, 8, and 10. School districts can choose to give the assessments on paper or by computer.

These end-of-year assessments inform policy makers and the public, including parents, about how well students are meeting Alaska's academic standards; provide data to improve schools and to close achievement gaps; and ensure equity in educational opportunity for all students. School districts will continue to use classroom assessments throughout the school year to monitor student progress and inform instruction.

"The statewide assessments are just one piece of a balanced accountability system," Commissioner Dr. Michael Johnson said. "They give parents, educators, policy makers and citizens information on how well the public education system is working. Additionally, an effective statewide assessment system is an essential part of student learning. Our new assessments will maximize the purpose of a statewide assessment and minimize the amount of time needed to take the test."

"The process that Commissioner Johnson led was transparent and very inclusive. Multiple education stakeholders participated and focused on meeting requirements while respecting local control and efforts," said Dr. Lisa Skiles Parady, Executive Director of the Alaska Council of School Administrators.

“He threaded the needle between fulfilling federal mandates while sustaining what works best across Alaska. In doing so, Commissioner Johnson made major headway in developing confidence across the spectrum of those who work day in and day out in education -- parents, teachers, school board members and educators. We are confident as we move to implementation that the Commissioner and his staff will do what is necessary to support school districts,” Dr. Parady said.

“I’d like to thank the department for being thorough in their reflective process in selecting an assessment that is both purposeful and less time-consuming for our students,” said Amy Jo Meiners, the Alaska Teacher of the Year in 2016.

“This assessment is one piece of the accountability system that will offer a high-level picture of how schools are doing,” said Sean Dusek, Superintendent of the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District and president of the Alaska Superintendents Association.

“There will be growing pains in any transition, but we trust the Commissioner and state department on their selection and believe the appropriate support will be provided to implement this assessment. We also believe that minimal instructional time will be necessary to implement this assessment so that we can maintain our focus on meeting individual student needs while still being accountable to state and federal oversight,” Superintendent. Dusek said.

The department and DRC are negotiating a contract for the current school year, with options for annual renewals through the 2020-2021 school year. The federal government contributes approximately \$3.5 million a year toward the cost of Alaska’s statewide assessments. The state pays the remainder of costs.

The department chose DRC, which is headquartered in Maple Grove, Minn., from among six applicants. The five other vendors were Measured Progress, Measurement Inc., PARCC, Pearson, and Questar.

In choosing a vendor, the department considered comments from stakeholders representing Alaska educational organizations, superintendents, district test coordinators, and teachers. The department repeatedly talked with vendors about their proposals; considered the vendors’ budgets and technical proposals; and checked references from states in which the vendors have experience.

The stakeholders were asked to rate vendors on their capability of providing assessments that meet Alaska’s needs. The department also looked at whether vendors offered individual student reports that are easy to read and understand; find the right balance

between words and graphics; and provide information that is meaningful to parents and educators.

DRC currently delivers Alaska's assessments in English language proficiency for English language learners who are not yet able to communicate fluently in English. From 2005 to 2014, DRC was the department's contractor for statewide assessments in reading, writing, and math, and for science assessments through 2015.

Additionally, Alaska will work with tribal organizations and other stakeholders to develop a plan to administer assessments that are written in languages other than English, particularly Native languages.

A six-minute video that explains the purpose of Alaska's statewide assessments is at <https://vimeo.com/193465985>.

