



Memorandum

March 3, 2022

The Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) has been working closely with NWEA to develop an innovative approach to statewide assessment to better serve both students and educators. Since June 2021, the DEED Assessment Team and NWEA development team have been meeting with Alaska education stakeholders, assessment experts, and state education partners to garner input on everything from assessment design to professional development. The Alaska System of Academic Readiness (AK STAR) is being designed as a balanced assessment system that will streamline testing while celebrating student growth and school achievement. This innovative system will also yield more actionable data for teaching and learning.

The testing window for the first administration of the AK STAR summative assessment opens on March 28th. To ensure the system is ready for launch, DEED encourages districts to host a Reach for the Stars Day in early March. Reach for the Stars Day will include a run-through of the AK STAR assessment on district testing devices. Districts are encouraged to participate in Reach for the Stars Day by simulating the testing experience with practice tests. The purpose is twofold: ensure the technical components function as intended and familiarize both students and staff with the new testing platform.

Reach for the Stars Day builds upon the work both DEED and district staff have already invested to ensure a smooth transition to AK STAR. The DEED Assessment Team has met with District Testing Coordinators monthly since September 2021 and held the annual District Testing Coordinator training in Anchorage last week. Additionally, a whole host of resources have been presented to district staff and are available on DEED's Assessment webpage. These resources range from webinars on administering AK STAR to tools for communicating with families.

New this Spring, DEED is offering the Certified Facilitator training. On Monday, February 7th, DEED provided all superintendents with the Certified Facilitator registration packet. Certified Facilitators will need to be selected by March 31st. Beginning in June, Certified Facilitators will begin attending training on assessment literacy, balanced assessments, assessment data literacy, and many more assessment related topics. Certified Facilitators will then serve as a district resource to build assessment capacity and ensure that your schools and educators are better prepared to use the data and information gleaned from the AK STAR assessment reports to drive instruction and learning in all Alaska schools.

The development process for the AK STAR system will continue through June 2022. There will continue to be opportunities for stakeholder input for both Standard Setting and Alignment

studies. DEED's Assessment Team will be seeking educators to support this work. These are great opportunities for your educators to participate in the process, provide local insights in the development process, and learn more about how the statewide assessment system is developed.

In addition to the efforts to effectively communicate the changes to English Language Arts and Math assessment, DEED has also been working closely with District Testing Coordinators to prepare for the first full administration of the Alaska Science Assessment. DTCs have received training on the science assessment at the monthly meetings and at the DTC convening in February, as well as tools, resources, manuals, and student preparation materials to prepare for the upcoming administration. The Alaska Science Assessment test window is from March 28 through April 29 and will assess 5th, 8th, and 10th grade students. The Alaska Science Assessment will also be undergoing both Standard Setting and Alignment studies this summer. District staff are encouraged to engage in these processes as well.

Educators interested in supporting the assessment development process can complete a stakeholder engagement survey and sign up to be contacted for upcoming engagement processes at the DEED assessment website.

As a recap, DEED is providing the following assessment engagement opportunities:

- 1) Submit Certified Facilitator applications by March 31st. Contact Kelly Manning at Kelly.manning@alaska.gov for applications, questions, and support.
- 2) Encourage staff to participate in Professional Learning webinars. Learn about upcoming webinars and seminars at: <https://education.alaska.gov/assessments/akstar/professional-learning>
- 3) Encourage staff to participate in Standard Setting and Alignment studies for AK STAR and the Alaska Science Assessment. Sign up to be notified of opportunities at: <https://education.alaska.gov/assessments/educator-resources>

Thank you for your support and input on the assessment development process to date. If you have any questions or need additional support for a successful administration of this spring's assessment, please contact our office as soon as possible. We anticipate the Spring 2022 AK STAR assessment will be a success. I look forward to working closely with you and your staff and communities to use the information this new approach to assessment provides to improve educational outcomes for every student in Alaska.

Sincerely,

Michael Johnson
Commissioner