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Press Release

COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

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Schools Successful in First Administration of the Alaska Measures of Progress

JUNEAU – Alaska’s public schools successfully completed their first administration of statewide computer-based tests, Alaska Education Commissioner Mike Hanley said today. From March 30 to May 1, approximately 70,300 students in grades 3 to 10 took the state’s new English and math tests, the Alaska Measures of Progress (AMP), on a computer.

“Adjusting to a more rigorous test that aligns to our standards, as well as moving to a computer-based format, was a big step,” Commissioner Hanley said. “Our districts worked hard to make the changes, and our students adapted well to the change. It was a tremendously successful rollout.”

School district superintendents said the computer-based testing generally went smoothly. Minor technology issues were identified and solved.

Schools prepared for the technology through numerous trainings and by holding a trial run in January. During the testing window, the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development and its testing contractor, the Achievement and Assessment Institute, made support teams available to schools.

“Overall, kids seem to be adjusting to the test smoothly,” said Theresa Hamilton, the technology integration facilitator for the Bering Strait School District, which serves students in 15 communities in Northwest Alaska. Younger students said that testing is more fun on a computer than on paper, she said. Some middle school students had mixed reactions to the test but they didn’t want to go back to a paper test next year, Hamilton said.

In the first two days of testing there were some connectivity issues at a few schools but they were resolved quickly, said Kristen Mashiana, coordinator of assessment for the

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Bering Strait School District. “By day three we seem to have worked out the kinks,” she said.

Students adapted smoothly to the computer-based tests, said Robert Boyle, superintendent of the Ketchikan Gateway Borough School District. “We find students almost eager to test.”

Some 4th-graders in Juneau preferred the computer-based assessment to a paper test because it did not ask only multiple choice questions. The students also liked using the computers’ tools, such as the search function, tags to mark parts that were important, and hearing the directions read to them.

One student liked writing thoughts on the electronic sticky notes and coming back to them to check the answer. “The search tool made it easy to find the part I was looking for in the passage without having to read the whole thing again,” a student said.

“Testing went pretty well and definitely much smoother than we anticipated,” said Kerry Boyd, superintendent of the Yukon-Koyukuk School District. “All in all it was a positive experience district-wide.” Students said they preferred this new test, and teachers said they appreciated AMP’s increased flexibility, Boyd said.

The Alaska Measures of Progress was designed for Alaska and its standards, which prepare students to enter postsecondary training and education without needing remediation in English and math.

Over 900 Alaskan educators reviewed the test questions prior to implementation to be sure they adequately measured the state’s standards, were free of bias, and were appropriate for Alaskan students. Test questions are only about reading, writing, and math. There are no questions of a personal nature.

Because AMP is computer-based, it can assess more than just basic skills in a fill-in-the-bubble format. AMP questions can better assess critical thinking, analytical skills, and problem solving – skills that are needed in today’s world.

“Too many of our students have left high school without the skills they need to be successful in college, training for a skilled trade, the workplace, or the military,” Commissioner Hanley said. “Parents deserve to know early on if their child is meeting grade-level standards, and teachers deserve information that helps them know if students need additional support or challenge. The AMP assessment is a tool that will provide this information.”

AMP is not a pass-fail test. It is an assessment that provides information to students, parents, and schools to show personal growth and whole-school information so the public can see how their public schools are doing. Students’ scores place them in one of four performance levels, none of which represents failure. AMP is not a high-stakes test. Results don’t affect grades, graduation, or promotion from one grade to the next.

Results from this first administration will be available in mid-October. This is later than it will be in future years as more than 100 Alaskan educators will determine the proposed cut scores for each performance level on these new assessments in July, and the State Board of Education & Early Development will vote on adopting the proposed cut scores in September.

Student data is protected just as it always has been. Federal and state laws do not allow the federal government to have access to Alaska's data about individual students.

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