

Supporting State Assessment Amid a Pandemic

A Q&A WITH NATIONAL TEST VENDORS

Recently, the Collaborative for Student Success and EducationCounsel spoke with representatives from major statewide summative assessment vendors to learn more about how they are supporting states and reducing burden on educators as they seek to administer assessments in spring 2021. The conversation included Steve Kromer, from **Cambium Assessment** (which includes the former assessment division of AIR); Lisa Lepic, from **Pearson**; and Sandy Wiese, from **Data Recognition Corporation** (which includes the former assessment division of McGraw-Hill). The three vendors provide assessments in all 50 states.

This information is now being published to help provide accurate information about the feasibility of statewide assessment in spring 2021, including remote administration. The information is designed to help inform students, families, teachers, and district and state leaders as they create plans to assess the impacts of the pandemic this spring. This information is not exhaustive of all questions and options, but should provide insight into the major considerations around remote and in-person testing this spring.

Here is information from that meeting:

1 Is it possible to administer statewide assessments remotely? How complicated is it? How ready are states to do this?

We are prepared to help states offer remote administration of a statewide assessment in the spring. This is viable if we plan now and work together. The majority of states already use computers or other devices to administer their assessments, although typically within a school setting. Remote administration is possible and can be provided by vendors as long as states ensure that students have access to approved devices and the internet. We recognize that this remains a challenge in some places and many states are already exploring remote administration as an option.

2 How quickly can assessment results be delivered to states, and can you help them get results into the hands of teachers and parents any faster? Do you think you will have them back in time to inform summer learning programs or specific efforts to help students catch-up? What role do states play in getting these results to parents and families quickly?

We can provide summative assessment results to states quickly depending upon the design of the assessment and if states choose to provide preliminary results to students, teachers, and parents. Traditional scoring of open-ended or constructed response questions can take additional time. States typically have additional quality control and research measures in place, including additional analyses and data validation processes that take more time, which can result in students, families, and schools not receiving their test results until later in the summer or early fall.

3 What changes to a state's summative assessment can be made to decrease the time needed for a student to complete the assessment?

There are a variety of actions that states can take in order to decrease the time needed to complete an assessment. States can adjust the number of items that are tested this year by eliminating field test items. Some states are also looking into options for creating a shortened version of their test for this year.

4 What changes to a state's summative assessment can be made to decrease the burden on teachers, schools, and families?

We stand ready to help states make a variety of changes to their assessments and to administer tests in the classroom or remotely — with innovations designed to support teachers, families, and schools. We have designed system checks to provide teachers and students the ability to verify that their devices are ready and will work for testing. We have the ability to extend customer service support hours to provide additional assistance outside of the traditional school day. We can also help states to accommodate changes to the testing window. We are also expanding communications to better prepare students for testing. Some states are looking at ways to gather input from and communicate decisions to relevant stakeholders as they design their plans for test administration.

5 Can classroom educators serve as proctors or will third parties be used? Are there other privacy concerns you have heard raised that you can help address?

Yes, classroom educators or other school staff that are familiar with students can be used as proctors for remote administration of assessments. Third party proctors are not necessary for remote administration, and we are not aware of any state considering their use. Parents and families may have privacy concerns, but states should make efforts to ensure that parents and families are informed and comfortable with how proctoring by educators will happen. We recommend that assessment administration feel and look just as remote classroom instruction has for students.

6 Are there greater risks to test security with virtual assessment? How can these risks be mitigated?

There are certain concerns with remote administration, such as item security and cheating. However, many actions can be taken to reduce these concerns and risks. Remote testing options provided by vendors can include secure systems that can lock down access to other browsers on a student's computer. Proctoring can help reduce the opportunity for cheating. Some states have the option of using different test forms to limit the exposure of test questions. We can work with states to help them and their districts/schools on a plan for how students, parents, and families can support the ensuring of test security.

7 What impact will remote assessment have on validity and reliability? Can states and districts still use the remote assessment data in order to inform decisions for how best to recover from the pandemic?

Results from a remote administration may look different than previous years, but the results will be valuable. Every year, including this year, we work with states to evaluate and review data to ensure that results are valid and reliable. States and districts will still be able to use the data from a remote administration to guide decision making. In particular, we believe that the results this year can be especially helpful to states as they recover from the impact of this pandemic and work to identify schools and students for additional support and resources. Given the vast impacts that this pandemic has had on our education systems, including so many factors being outside the influence of teachers and students, we would urge states to be thoughtful in how data and results are used this year.

8 Can states still disaggregate data to the student group level if they have less than typical participation?

Yes. States and districts should make every effort to reach all their students. However, even if a state cannot test all of its students, they will still be able to disaggregate data to the student group level. Certain districts and schools may need to evaluate their data to ensure that student privacy is maintained, but in those exceptional cases, student subgroup level data can still be disaggregated at the state level.

9 How can students with disabilities receive accommodations, modifications, and other supports during remote administration? How can English language learners be supported during remote administration? How can the assessments reflect their language needs?

Students with disabilities can receive many of the same accommodations, modifications, and other supports they typically receive during statewide assessments. As many states were already using computers or other devices to administer assessments, accommodations for remote administration are not new. The software used for the remote administration can also be used with assistive devices, which students may already be using. Districts and schools may need to develop supplemental plans, and work with their state assessment vendor, to support students with more severe disabilities. Our goal is to ensure that every student can test safely.

Similarly, students who are English learners will also receive the appropriate support and accommodations that they need to participate fully in remote administration. States should work with their districts and schools to ensure that guidance materials and resources for students and families reflect the full diversity of languages that students speak within their communities. Support materials can be provided to parents in their native language to provide them with an understanding of the assessment process.

10 How much more does it cost a state to administer their summative assessments remotely? Are there other budget considerations or needs for remote administration?

Switching to remote administration itself creates no significant cost implications for a state's contract with an assessment vendor. States or schools will need to provide devices and connectivity for remote administration, but these are already needed and being used for remote instruction.