
MEMORANDUM

TO: Superintendents, Independent School Heads of School, Principals Test Administrators, Test Coordinators and Curriculum Coordinators

FROM: Heather A. Bouchey, Ph.D., Interim Secretary of Education

SUBJECT: Response to Concerns with Cognia Assessment

DATE: April 12, 2023

I know many in the field are concerned about the deployment of the new Cognia state assessment, particularly with the testing window opening today. As many of you know, the state procurement process for selecting a new vendor (required due to our contract with Smarter Balanced expiring) was significantly held up in an extended, and unanticipated, process. The Agency of Education (AOE) takes full responsibility for the associated delay in the Cognia rollout and its impact on the training timeline for the field.

We have addressed the shortened training timeline by distributing training documents and materials as speedily as possible, holding weekly technical support sessions for LEA assessment administrators and coordinators, and making AOE staff available to provide support or technical assistance to any school or district personnel who needs it.

In addition, I have authorized Cognia and our assessment team to ensure that the assessment portal remains open for another two weeks past the current closing date, until June 9, 2023. *A two-week makeup period will now be available to any SU/SD that requires a bit more time for fully implementing the general assessment.*

I am grateful to the district and school professionals who are working hard to get this year's assessment deployment right. We often strive for excellence in Vermont, and I am confident we will ultimately have good, valid, and reliable information from this year's state assessment. I am asking all of us to do our best as we navigate this transition.

I would like to take the opportunity to reinforce several important things:

1. The annual assessment is very important. It is one of the few tools that provides statewide information about how our students are performing in math, ELA, and science. However, it is not the only assessment tool for SU/SDs to use. Under EQS, each SU/SD in Vermont has a local comprehensive assessment system, comprised typically of a variety of benchmarking, formative and performance task tools that also provide important, actionable data on how students are doing. Often these components of the LCAS are used to inform teachers and school level administrators about the instructional practices and supports needed for



students to be successful. Reminding communities about the broad array of assessment tools available can be a strategy for informing parents and assuaging concerns about the state assessment.

2. We've received several requests for the AOE to designate this year's assessment as a "pilot," including not counting the state and local results in our annual snapshot. However, this is not something the AOE has the authority to do. Federal law requires annual state testing consistent with the state's approved ESSA plan. Typically, it would take something quite catastrophic for the U.S. Department of Education (USED) to grant any leeway on required state testing – we saw this occur uniquely during the global pandemic. Similarly, requesting a federal waiver for our required state testing is not possible. It takes months to get approval and would likely not be granted for a procurement delay.
3. Some SU/SDs are worried about participation rates, knowing that we are obligated to test at least 95% of all eligible students to meet federal compliance. I ask that you, again, simply do your best to remind students and families about the importance of state testing and why we do it every year, encourage students to get rest and arrive well-nourished, and to, above all, try not to get too anxious about the test. Again, we are simply asking everyone to do their best. I am confident that, with such a shared approach, we will have a successful first year of testing with Cognia.

Finally, the Agency continues to stand ready to provide assistance and supports to any district or school personnel who need it. We will also be providing districts with communication templates and resources to be used as resources for conversations with your community and stakeholders.

For additional information on technical assistance and support, please contact Danielle Dupuis, State Assessment Director at Danielle.Dupuis@vermont.gov.

The Agency will provide another update next week, including resources for communicating with your family and school communities about the Cognia assessment.

Thank you for helping to make Vermont's education system among the best in the nation and world.