
MEMORANDUM

TO: Superintendents, Special Education Administrators, Independent School Heads, District Test Administrators

FROM: Daniel M. French, Ed.D., Secretary of Education

SUBJECT: New Alternate Assessment Implementation for SY23

DATE: January 30, 2023

Purpose

The Vermont Agency of Education (AOE) has finalized procurement of a vendor to develop and implement statewide summative alternate assessments of English Language Arts (ELA), math and science. Beginning in the 2022-23 school year, the state will employ new statewide alternate assessments of ELA, Math, and Science, developed and implemented with Cognia. Please note that this memo pertains to the alternate assessments, although Cognia has recently been contracted to develop and implement our general assessment as well.

This memo is intended to inform supervisory unions (SU/SDs) and independent schools of the upcoming transition and describe next steps towards the 2023 administration of the alternate assessment.

Overview of the Procurement Process

The Agency of Education is required by federal law to administer a peer-reviewed assessment to all students in the areas of Math, Science, and English Language Arts (ELA). Students who have significant cognitive disabilities must be provided with an alternate assessment opportunity, comparable to the opportunity available through the general assessment.

The alternate assessment contract through Vermont's previous vendor was not due to expire this school year. But that solution had been requiring a substantial amount of federal funding and resource investment to actualize, and Vermont's procurement of a new vendor for the general assessment created an opportunity for the AOE to revisit its alternate assessment timelines and workflows as well.

As required by [State Bulletin 3.5 Procurement and Contracting Policies](#), the procurement process for an alternate assessment vendor began on March 3, 2022, with the hope that a new solution might result in a cost reduction that would allow the state to

Contact Information: If you have questions about this document or would like additional information, please contact Chris Case at chris.case@vermont.gov.

redirect funding to other initiatives, and simplify the assessment delivery process for local educators. Vendors submitted bid proposals, which were scored by a team of AOE staff with expertise in assessment, data, reporting, special education, and accountability. Based on collective scores, vendor demonstrations that included SU/SD staff participation, and Best and Final Offers, the review team recommended Cognia as the vendor to carry out the contracted work. This recommendation was approved by the State Board of Education and the AOE then moved forward accordingly with the contracting process.

Why Did the AOE Select Cognia?

The AOE selected Cognia for the following key reasons:

1. **Integration of diversity, equity and inclusion:** Cognia demonstrated and documented a superior approach to integrating principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion into their organization, the assessment development process, and implementation procedures. The assessment includes superior accessibility features and is highly adaptable due to the organization's use of enhanced technology.
2. **Comprehensiveness of Services:** Cognia provides a comprehensive suite of resources, including annual summative assessments, robust item banks, advanced accessibility features and accommodations, advanced item interoperability, implementation and training resources, as well as strong customer support services.
3. **Implementation interface:** Cognia provides an enhanced interface for test set up, delivery, and performance. Educator, student and family engagement with the solution is intuitive and accessible.

What Can We Expect for the 2022-23 School Year?

- Cognia's assessments will take the place of the previous assessments developed by Cambium.
- The AOE and Cognia are developing a training and implementation plan that will support SU/SDs during the transition. An overview of this plan is included below and will be supplemented with additional communication from the AOE in the coming weeks.
 - Cognia has already begun training the AOE on this assessment. Cognia training resources will be made available to educators on February 27 through the Multi-State Alternate Assessment (MSAA) site; we do not expect schools or SU/SDs to have to develop any of their own training materials.
- Vermont will have the ability to participate in the MSAA Consortium. In the remainder of SY 2022-23, we will likely limit our participation to engagement designed to facilitate the implementation of the MSAA this spring. But in the coming years, we expect to be more actively involved in the consortium and will work to identify opportunities for field engagement in the consortium as well.
- The following policies/procedures will not change because of the change in assessment vendors:
 - Participation requirements

- Reporting
- Federally recognized exemptions
- Appointment of a District Test Coordinator (TC) by the Superintendent
- Annual training requirements
- Assurances of proper and secure test administration

Implementation Timeline

This section provides an anticipated Multi-State Alternate Assessment (MSAA) implementation timeline running from late January to March 13, when the alternate assessment window opens for SU/SDs. The alternate assessment window will be open from March 13 to April 28, 2023. This timeline is not comprehensive, but is intended to be a starting point in framing milestones, resources, and communications channels. Please note that the alternate assessment administration window differs from the general assessment window for SY 2022-23, which runs from April 12-May 26, 2023.

The AOE acknowledges that the extended timeline for this procurement process has caused confusion and delay for SUs. And because the procurement process is protected, the Agency has been prohibited from sharing any information related to the outcome of the Request for Proposal (RFP) earlier. Following the finalization of procurement, we are committed to executing on this contract as expediently as possible, and will work with Cognia to provide educators with the necessary related support and training.

The AOE asks that SU/SDs plan with the following timeline in mind:

January 30:

- Release of the New Alternate Assessment Implementation for SY 2023 Memo from Secretary French
- Release of the MSAA 2023 TA System User Guide
- Release of the MSAA Test Administration Manual

Week of January 30:

- Launch an updated Alternate Assessment page on the AOE website
- 1/30-2/1: MSAA will be down for system updates

Week of February 6:

- Release of the Alternate Assessment School System Readiness Checklist
- Save the date: MSAA Office Hours, Tuesday, February 7, 2PM-3PM

Week of Feb 13:

- 2/13-2/17: MSAA will be down for system updates
- 2/15: last day for SU/SDs to export their previous assessment data from Cambium (see below)
- Release of FAQ Document responding to educator questions
- Save the date: MSAA Office Hours, Tuesday, February 14, 2PM-3PM

Week of **Feb 20**:

- Release of updated FAQ Document responding to educator questions, as needed
- Save the date: MSAA Office Hours, Tuesday, February 21, 2PM-3PM
- 2/21: User Creation window opens for LEAs. MSAA will create user profiles for Test Coordinators (TCs) prior to this date; TCs will have the opportunity to create additional user profiles for staff in their schools as of February 21.

Feb 27:

- MSAA Training Modules go live

Week of **Feb 27**:

- Save the date: MSAA Office Hours, Tuesday, February 28, 2PM-3PM
- Release of updated FAQ Document responding to educator questions, as needed

Week of **March 6**:

- Save the date: MSAA Office Hours, Tuesday, March 7, 2PM-3PM
- Release of updated FAQ Document responding to educator questions, as needed

March 13: MSAA Administration Window Opens

March 13-April 28: Complete End of Test Survey (EOTS)

April 25: Last Day to Submit Requests

- Grade reassignments
- Reopen closed tests

April 28: MSAA Administration Window Closes

Introductory Multi-State Alternate Assessment (MSAA) Resources

As a starting point in gaining an understanding of the MSAA, educators are encouraged to familiarize themselves with MSAA through the MSAA Test Administration Manual, and the MSAA System User Guides. These resources are available on the [Alternate Assessment Page](#) of the AOE website, and on the [MSAA site](#), which has a wide variety of resources that are available to educators who create accounts in that system.

The Test Administration Manual (TAM) provides important test administration dates and contact information for the questions that may come up as a part of test administration. The manual includes:

- administration procedures for before, during, and after testing
- guidance on who can administer the tests
- test designs

- accessibility features and accommodations
- test security protocols

The **MSAA 2023 System User Guides** include separate guides for Test Administrators and Test Coordinators. Those guides:

- are customized for the specific functions of each user role
- provide clear step-by-step directions with screenshots for navigating the MSAA System
- outline MSAA testing procedures
- include MSAA technology specifications

Many additional resources are available within the MSAA system. Educators are encouraged to explore the site independently once they have created accounts in the system. As the test administration window approaches, the AOE will continue to highlight and share out recommended MSAA resources within our weekly Alternate Assessment communications.

Alternate Assessment Communications

Given the truncated timeline for Alternate Assessment preparation, the AOE will be sending out weekly updates containing reminders about that week's milestones, supports, LEA responsibilities, and recommended reading/resources. We anticipate that these updates will be released weekly. Updates will be delivered through the Special Education Directors' listserv, the Alternate Assessment Test Coordinator (TC) mailing list, and the Curriculum Leaders listserv, along with the Weekly Field Memo and the Assessment Newsletter. Superintendents will get an abbreviated weekly update through the Superintendents' newsletter.

The AOE will also be hosting a series of weekly office hours dedicated to the alternate assessment. Those dates and times are in the timeline section of this document, above. More information and meeting links will be relayed through the Special Education Directors' listserv, the Alternate Assessment TC mailing list, and the Curriculum Leaders listserv, along with the AOE's Weekly Field Memo and the Assessment Newsletter.

If you are not signed up for the listserv related to your role in your LEA, please connect with these points of contact and ask to be added to that list:

- Special Education Directors' Listserv (Special Education Directors only): Sabine Perry at sabine.perry@vermont.gov
- Alternate Assessment TC mailing list: Sabine Perry at sabine.perry@vermont.gov
- [Sign up to receive the Weekly Field Memo](#)

The AOE will also be developing and updating a dynamic FAQ document reflecting questions that have been voiced by the field. That document will be released on February 13 and updated regularly to reflect questions from educators that have been collected by the AOE.

What Should I Be Doing First to Prepare for the MSAA?

In the short term, SU/SDs should focus on familiarizing themselves with the TAM and MSAA User Guides and should work to ensure that they have access to the communications channels that MSAA updates will be delivered through (listservs, Weekly Field Memo posts).

Cognia will be setting up user profiles for Alternate Assessment District Test Administrators (DAs) in the MSAA portal between February 21 and February 24, 2023. The AOE will work with SU/SDs prior to February 21 to ensure that the DA information that we have is accurate. After LEA DAs have their user profiles, the [MSAA Portal](#) will become open to users, who will need to complete MSAA training modules before they have full access to the platform. Full access will include the ability to enter and update student information, and to complete Learner Characteristic Inventories (LCIs).

SU/SDs are responsible for sharing all AOE's MSAA communications and resources with the independent schools that serve their students. If you have questions about this requirement, please contact Chris Case at chris.case@vermont.gov.

What Do I Need to Do Before the Current Contract with Cambium Ends?

- SUs will need to export data from the Cambium Reporting System for all assessments and administrations (including both general and alternate assessments). Instructions are available to help SUs with this process. This must be done by February 15, 2023.
- Access to all Cambium platforms and products (i.e., VTCAP Portal, TIDE, the DEI) for alternate state assessments of ELA, Math, and Science will end effective February 20, 2023.

Who Do I Contact if I Have Questions?

The AOE is in the process of hiring a new coordinator for the alternate assessment; that person will become the new first point of contact for the alternate assessment questions in the future. For the SY 2022-23 Alternate Assessment, questions can be directed as follows:

- Technical Support questions: MSAA Service Center
- Phone: (866) 834-8879
- Email: MSAAServiceCenter@cognia.org
- Live Chat: Link at the bottom of the MSAA System Dashboard

Questions about student-specific modifications and accommodations, including accommodations and modifications for English Learners: AOE.SpecialEd@vermont.gov

Questions about the MSAA Consortium: Ana Russo at ana.russo@vermont.gov

Questions about transferring data from the Cambium Reporting System: Glenn Bailey at glenn.bailey@vermont.gov.

Questions about the general assessment: Mabika Goma at goma.mabika@vermont.gov.

All other alternate assessment questions: Chris Case at chris.case@vermont.gov