

AGENCY OF EDUCATION
Montpelier, Vermont

TEAM: Student Support Services, Data Management & Analysis

ACTION ITEM: Will the State Board of Education authorize the Secretary to, on its behalf, award a three-year contract, with the possibility of two one-year extensions, to develop and implement statewide summative assessments of ELA, Math, and Science for students with significant cognitive disabilities (aka, alternate assessments) to Cognia, pursuant with the requirements set forth in federal law--ESSA, Section 1111 and IDEA, Section 300.160 --in preparation for administration beginning in the 2022-2023 school year.

SECRETARY'S RECOMMENDED ACTION:

That the State Board authorize the Secretary to, on its behalf, award a three-year contract, with the possibility of two one-year extensions, to develop and implement statewide summative assessments of ELA, Math, and Science for students with significant cognitive disabilities (aka, alternate assessments) to Cognia, pursuant with the requirements set forth in federal law--ESSA, Section 1111 and IDEA, Section 300.160--in preparation for administration beginning in the 2022-2023 school year.

STATUTORY AUTHORITY: 16 V.S.A. § 1071, State Board Rule 2300.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Federal law requires the Agency of Education to administer a peer-reviewed assessment to students in the areas of Math, Science, and English Language Arts (ELA). If a State has adopted alternate academic achievement standards for children with disabilities who are students with the most significant cognitive disabilities as permitted in section 1111(b)(1)(E) of the ESEA, the State must develop and implement alternate assessments and guidelines for the participation in alternate assessments of those children with disabilities who cannot participate in regular assessments, even with accommodations, as indicated in their respective IEPs. The Agency of Education has identified the statewide alternate summative assessment contract as an area for potential cost savings. In June 2023, development and implementation contracts expire for the current ELA, Math and Science assessments. Based on [State Bulletin 3.5 Procurement and Contracting Policies](#), the State is required to issue a Request for Proposals (RFP), as the maximum term of the contract will have been executed. To maximize cost savings and align with general statewide assessment contract implementation, the existing contract will be terminated in October 2022 and the new contract will be implemented in the 2022-2023 school year, with an

estimated August 1, 2022, start date. The Division of Student Support Services (SSS) engaged stakeholders in the vendor demonstration process to ensure robust input into the vendor selection process.

The Secretary recommends awarding the contract to Cognia, an industry leader in K-12 assessment. Cognia was rated the highest during the initial bid review and delivered a superior demonstration. The products and services proposed exceed that of our current contracts and that of the competing vendors. This proposal offers substantial cost savings for IDEA funds as well.

This change in vendor will impact our ability to make comparisons across years, as we will not be able to make valid comparisons between the new assessment and the legacy assessment. That said, we are aware that results from 2020 are not available and results from 2021 are not comparable to previous years due to nuances of the pandemic, so we feel that data continuity will be interrupted regardless of the vendor selection. Data obtained through the Cognia alternate summative assessment platform will be reported to the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) annually in Vermont's Annual Performance Report under Indicator 3c Proficiency rate for children with IEPs against alternate academic achievement standards on ELA/MA in grades 4, 8, and 9. Vermont recently set targets for the next six years within its State Performance Plan so this is an opportune time to select a long term vendor for consistency in our mandated reporting and deployment of technical assistance for districts not meeting state-established targets.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS: This work is in support of existing policy so there should be no impact.

EDUCATION IMPLICATIONS: Standards are not changing, only the assessment that measures those standards will change because of this required procurement.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS: This new contract will be supported by significantly reduced amount of IDEA funds compared to the previous contract and represents a greater value proposition on several fronts, including but not limited to:

- Modern platform and unified user experience
- Simplified user experience
- Great user support
- Reduced SEA and LEA personnel time required to manage and implement
- More accessible and readily usable instructional resources
- Student-centered focus on development and administration of assessments

Thus, when factoring the significant reduction in the SEA and LEA staff time required to manage and implement this system, the recommended vendor represents a considerable return on the investment from the perspective of total cost of ownership for this assessment system.

STAFF AVAILABLE: Chris Case, Division Director, Student Support Services
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