



# NEBRASKA

## DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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### Nebraska Statewide Assessments

**No Obligation of the State:** This Request for Information (RFI) is an informational request and in no way creates any obligation on the part of the Nebraska Department of Education.

**Request for Information:** The Nebraska Department of Education is requesting information from qualified vendors who can provide, administer, score and report results for statewide summative assessments in English Language Arts, mathematics, and science to be administered annually beginning no later than the school year of 2017-2018. In addition, NDE seeks information from qualified vendors to provide professional development for assessment literacy, balanced assessment, and the use of data to improve learning. The Nebraska Department of Education will use the information from this RFI to inform the development of a Request For Proposal to be released in December 2016 to seek a vendor to provide Nebraska Statewide Assessments.

### INTRODUCTION

Nebraska Department of Education's Office of Assessment & Accountability is seeking information from vendors in regards to English language arts (ELA), mathematics and science summative assessments to be administered operationally beginning in spring 2018. Nebraska is seeking test designs that are aligned with Nebraska standards, provide information in addition to an overall score (e.g., sub-scores) in each content area to the degree possible within the purpose of the assessment, require a reasonable amount of testing time, can be delivered successfully to all schools and districts online, are valid and reliable, and are ready for administration no later than March 2018.

The summative assessments must be aligned with Nebraska's content standards in ELA, mathematics, and science and must meet all federal requirements for Peer Review under the Elementary and Secondary Education ACT as reauthorized by the Every Student Succeeds ACT (ESSA).

Grades to be assessed are:

- ELA and mathematics for grades 3-8
- Science for grades 5 and 8

Alternate assessments that are aligned to the Nebraska Extended Standards to



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be administered to students with the most significant cognitive disabilities must also be included for

- ELA and mathematics for 3-8 and 11
- Science for grades 5, 8, and 11

Nebraska requires administration of a computer-based assessment, with allowance for paper/pencil for students with IEP or 504 plans or ELL status for the general education assessments. Alternate Assessments are currently offered paper/pencil; however, NDE is open to innovative approaches to assessing students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

### **State law/regulations requirements related to assessments is**

Statute 79-760.03

<http://nebraskalegislature.gov/laws/statutes.php?statute=79-760.03>

### **Additional Components**

Beyond the delivery of statewide assessments, NDE seeks vendor(s) to provide components of a statewide balanced assessment system as included in Accountability for a Quality Assessment System, Today and Tomorrow, AQuESTT, available at <http://aquestt.com/> and to include:

- Branding: Development of a brand and logo for the statewide test
- Communication: Literature such as pamphlets, videos, or other multimedia to inform students, parents, teachers, administrators, school counselors, and public about state testing
- Interim System: An innovative interim system to provide opportunity to individualize student learning around all state standards, not only ones tested on statewide assessments.
- Professional Development-Assessment Literacy: Statewide professional development that engenders assessment literacy in general, effective use of statewide assessment results, and contributes to effective use of the interim system and systematic use of formative assessment
- Technology: Assessments will be delivered primarily online, include effective technology-enhanced items, and a facile, intuitive test management system.
  - A vendor may give information that it can provide the full assessment package, with all its support and delivery components, including technology OR
  - A vendor may respond to this RFI with information to provide only the test engine: the technology to deliver statewide summative assessments. Vendors that send information about

providing the test engine, but not providing the actual test items, test oversight, and/or all its supporting components must provide information that shows the company's experience and ability to partner with testing companies that do provide those components.

- Project Manager: If several companies are selected to fulfill all facets of this project, a project manager to oversee the project and manage the communication and cooperation of all companies is requested. The project manager for the whole project may represent one of the bidders of any of the components above or may be a representative of a different company than the ones selected to provide components above.

**A company may respond to this RFI by providing information pertaining to one component of the RFI, more than one, or all components of the RFI.**

### **Background**

Nebraska has approximately 150,000 students in grades 3 through 8 in 245 districts and five state operated schools. Approximately 1% of students in grades 3-8 and 11 participate in alternate statewide testing. In this proposal, the term "district" encompasses both types of schools. The districts range in size from around 100 students in the smallest to the largest district of over 49,000 students. Nebraska is primarily a rural agricultural state with the majority of the population and students located in the metropolitan areas along the eastern edge of the State. Additional information about Nebraska's districts, schools and students, including enrollment data by grade level, can be found on the State of the Schools Report (SOSR) on the Department's homepage at: <https://www.education.ne.gov/documents/SOSR.html>

### **Standards**

- September 15, 2014 the Nebraska State Board of Education adopted Nebraska's College and Career Ready Standards for English Language Arts.
- On September 4, 2015, the Nebraska State Board of Education adopted Nebraska's College and Career Ready Standards for Mathematics.
- In 2010, the Nebraska State Board of Education adopted the Nebraska Science Standards.
- Nebraska's College and Career Ready Standards for Science are being developed with targeted completion scheduled for August/September 2017.

Standards available-

<https://www.education.ne.gov/AcademicStandards/index.html>

Nebraska's assessments must measure the depth and breadth of Nebraska's standards, demonstrating a balance of content emphasis and cognitive complexity through all depths of knowledge levels. If an off-the-shelf test is proposed, the potential vendor must indicate commitment to an independent alignment study to be completed by using non-contractor consultants or a non-contractor organization, that includes evidence of the alignment of forms of the assessment in terms of distribution of content (i.e. knowledge and cognitive process) across the full range of the State's grade-level academic content area standards. If a custom or blended assessment is proposed for development, the assessment must be aligned to Nebraska's content area standards and the contractor will be responsible for providing an independent alignment study and review after the first year of implementation. Nebraska does not intend at this time to assess the listening and speaking standards of ELA.

### **Statewide Assessment Design**

NDE is looking for an innovative approach to assessment as it moves forward in assessing College and Career Ready standards in ELA, math, and science. Assessments may include multiple-choice items; however, NDE seeks assessments that include rigorous new item types, which are more effective in assessing higher order thinking skills and are more engaging to students. Technology-enhanced items must contribute to a significant portion of the assessment. NDE is interested in inclusion of adaptive testing. While open-ended items may be included, the vendor must include analysis of student time to administer and demonstration of ability to return assessment results to students, schools, and parents on a timely schedule.

NDE is interested in working with a vendor to develop options or make changes that will meet the desires of Nebraska stakeholders in response to options allowed under the ESSA. Assessments must meet the requirements of peer review under ESSA and include:

- measurement of higher order thinking skills;
- measurement of growth on a vertical scale, and/or
- adaptivity.

For ELA and mathematics, a vendor shall respond with information on a summative assessment for operational administration in spring 2018 that is:

- An off-the-shelf assessment (commercially available, published, or vendor-owned), or
- An assessment developed with items from other sources that is augmented or customized for Nebraska.
- An assessment developed with items developed by Nebraska educators

For science, the state expects a vendor may use Nebraska's current science items and test blueprints to provide a summative science assessment in spring 2018 and 2019. If an off-the-shelf assessment is proposed, the vendor must include commitment to alignment to the current Nebraska State Standards for Science. In subsequent years when College and Career Ready Standards for Science are adopted, NDE expects a new assessment design that is aligned to the future Nebraska College and Career Ready Standards for Science, meets the intent of the new generation of innovative science assessments, and can contribute to a system to measure three-dimensional science learning.

NDE expects the vendor to include delivery of alternate statewide assessments in reading (ELA) and math for grades 3-8 & 11 and science for grades 5, 8, & 11.

In Nebraska's current assessment system, the same company that provides regular assessments provides the alternate assessments. However, a separate company may bid on only the alternate assessment within the full vision of this project.

With more innovative assessment item types, NDE expects timelier reporting of test results to schools and districts to better inform student learning. The vendor will provide evidence of timely reporting of results to districts and students.

The vendor that provides the assessments to be administered for statewide assessments in Nebraska must also include standard setting when needed, evidence of alignment to Nebraska standards, and psychometric support of the assessments.

### **Assessment time and scheduling**

The current computer-based ELA, mathematics, and science assessments are delivered over a six-week window with one week for make-up tests in spring of each school year, March to May. Schools have flexibility in scheduling the order and timing of the content assessments. Typically, students have used 50-60 minutes for each session of reading and math and 25-35 minutes for each session of science. Nebraska is transitioning to administering a NeSA-English Language Arts exam in spring 2017, which includes a text-dependent analysis. Students may use more time to complete the TDA as it is an open-ended item. Nebraska seeks assessments that can be delivered in a similar amount of time or less.

### **Accommodations and Paper-Based Assessments**

#### **Universal Design**

Nebraska's assessments must be built on a framework of accessibility for all students. It is important to Nebraska to provide the tools and accommodations to enable all students to demonstrate what they know and can do. Respondents must describe the process used to ensure that items permit students with disabilities and English learners to fully participate in the assessments and receive valid scores, while minimizing the need for accommodations. Vendor will explain how the needs of students with disabilities, especially sensory, physical and language disabilities, as well as English learners, were taken into consideration during item writing, assessment construction, and development of technology/online system. Vendor must describe to what extent individuals with expertise in working with students with disabilities and with English language learners were included in the development and review of the test items and the assessment system. In addition, vendor must explain how language load will be addressed.

Paper/pencil assessments have included the following accommodated forms:

- Large print. Approximately 170 students required large print in spring 2016.
- Braille. Approximately 16 students required Braille in spring 2016.

Online and paper/pencil modes of the test include

- ELA test with directions translated into Spanish.
- Mathematics and science tests fully translated into Spanish.
- NDE is open to other accommodations suggested by respondent.

Other tools in online engine to include

- Text-to-speech
- Speech-to-text, if open ended items are to be included
- NDE is open to other accommodations suggested by respondent.

### **Technology**

NDE is committed to continuing with a computer-based assessment for the long term. Many districts will require a local caching server option or another solution for unpredictable or low bandwidth. Many districts also require on-demand technical support for solving simple and complex technology issues. Nebraska is seeking information from interested vendors that demonstrates an understanding of specific issues that can occur with computer-based assessment and offers multiple, evidence-based solutions that include strong support for district staff.

For information on the technology to be used for online statewide summative testing for 2016-2017, see the Requirements at

<https://www.education.ne.gov/Assessment/NeSA%20Technology.html>

## **Reports**

Nebraska has provided two printed copies of individual student score reports to schools. Previous assessment contractors have produced summary and detail school and district assessment reports. These reports include the percentage of students in each of three levels of achievement by content area and grade level.

Expectations for the type of information on the state summative assessment reports have increased over the last several years by both educators and parents. Information of current statewide assessment reports is available at: <https://www.education.ne.gov/Assessment/Index.html>.

NDE seeks a score reporting design that is more informative and accessible for communicating with students and parents.

## **Training and support**

It is important to Nebraska that ancillary support materials such as test administration documents, interpretive guides, training materials, practice tests, etc. are of high quality and that a vendor have an editorial review and revision process that includes opportunities for input by NDE staff. It is important to Nebraska that support be provided directly by a vendor through a help-desk with extended hours during the test administration window. NDE is also seeking information from vendors that can provide not only web-based training but also on-site training, especially in the early phases of the project. Typically in Nebraska, the NDE team and the vendor partner to present sessions in five locations across the state. When new assessments are being administered, workshops may occur multiple times throughout the year.

## **PRIOR EXPERIENCE**

NDE is seeking information from vendors with the following minimum prior experience requirements:

- a) Vendor must provide evidence of successful implementation of at least three large-scale assessment contracts that have employed approaches similar to those proposed by the vendor within the last ten years
- b) Vendor's Project Director must have demonstrated previous experience with managing a large, customized assessment project similar in scope and nature to the Nebraska assessment system.

Vendor must include any online test interruptions that have occurred using its online test delivery system that resulted in loss of student responses, testing shutdown, cancellation or reduction of payment to the vendor, cancellation of contract, or litigation.

### **Branding of state test**

The current logo/brand for the state testing program is



NeSA was developed to represent “Nebraska State Accountability.” Nebraska now has a full accountability system, A Quality Education for Today and Tomorrow (AQuESTT). NDE requests that, in responding to this RFI, the vendor show **capacity and experience** in order to develop a logo and assessment name that aligns with the vision of Assessment within AQuESTT.

### **Strong communication**

NDE expects strong communication to be built around its assessment system, such as brochures written succinctly and accessibly for parents, students, patrons, and schools. This requirement may package with the logo. Deeper documents are also requested that include topics on the rationale of state testing, ways that state testing can improve student learning, ways that state testing can support strong class-room instructional practices, explanation of a balance between state testing to improve student learning and for use in accountability, communication of the limitations of statewide summative assessment, and support of a balanced assessment. NDE expects the communications to be developed specifically for Nebraska school districts, students, and patrons.

### **Local Interim Assessment & Promotion of Assessment Literacy**

NDE expects the vendor to provide a system for local assessment that assists districts in assessing all components of NE standards in order to improve student learning on state standards. NDE expects the system to be coupled with professional development that provides information and promotes collaboration in use of interim assessment to improve student learning. The system must score items, provide reports that analyze results for use by educators, and give teachers information to support individualized learning plans.

The interim system may be:



- An off-the-shelf system (commercially available, published, or vendor-owned), or
- A system developed with items from other sources that is augmented and/or customized for Nebraska.
- A system developed with items developed by Nebraska educators; current item bank has been developed.

### **Assessment Literacy**

NDE expects the vendor to provide a plan for systematic and systemic professional development associated with assessment literacy that starts with the results of state testing and incorporates information and results from the interim system, but expands beyond those to include student-centered learning, strong local formative assessment practices, and support for districts in developing systematic approaches for the use of assessment to improve student learning. The professional development will support the notion of summative testing as it balances with local assessment systems to promote effective assessments habits and the knowledge that all assessments should measure learning, that different assessments have different uses, and that curriculum, instruction, and assessment are the trifold support of student learning as they all relate to assessment literacy. In responses to the Evidence Based Analysis for the assessment tenet, an AQuESTT survey that was conducted in fall 2015, district leaders indicated a high need for support to schools/districts for systemic and systematic approaches to formative assessment and the desire for good professional development around assessment. NDE not only requests information pertaining to an interim system in this RFI, but also one that is coupled with strong professional development in order to engender assessment literacy and place the right emphasis/perspective on state summative tests.

### **Assessment Delivery and Support**

NDE expects the majority of tests to be delivered online and that the online system will operate without stress to students and adult school personnel. The technology delivery system must allow stops in testing for students such as those with Individual Education or 504 Plans or English Learner status to participate online, to provide shorter sessions over more time while still assuring the security of the test items. In addition, NDE expects human-voice-recorded text-to-speech available for accommodated students. The system must also provide speech-to-text so that accommodated students may participate in online open-ended items without human scribes. In addition, the online system must track students' use of tools and accommodations so

research can be conducted into the effectiveness of the use of tools and accommodations provided to students.

Paper/pencil assessments must be available for students who have documented needs for that mode. Currently, while almost 20% of students may be eligible for paper/pencil mode of state assessment, above 90% of students at all grades participate online.

NDE expects an intuitive Test Management system to accompany the test delivery. It must be fast, agile, and designed for effective use by educators. The system must make it easy for educators to add students to test sessions, to indicate accommodations, and to do multiple uploads. NDE expects the vendor to have sought feedback from end-users during development of the system and on an on-going basis.

### **Project Manager**

NDE seeks a full time project manager at NDE to potentially manage multiple contractors in order to integrate scheduling of aspects of the project to provide seamless statewide assessments and all the supports needed for them— communication, practice tests, scoring, score results, reports, psychometrics, and so on. Also, this person will manage possible conflicts among contractors under the direction of NDE. The project manager may be associated with the vendor providing the assessments and related services or may be an independent project manager.

**RESPONSE INFORMATION:** Interested vendors are invited to submit a letter of interest that includes a response to the following priorities. Provide succinct summary response to each item and identify any constraints or efficiencies for NDE consideration.

**A vendor may respond to this RFI by providing information pertaining to all components of the RFI numbers 1-20 or any combination, but must include cost estimates.**

**1. ELA and mathematics test for spring 2018, aligned to Nebraska College and Career Ready ELA and math standards**

Describe how you would address the summative testing requirements for ELA and mathematics in spring 2018, while highlighting tools and accommodations that ensure accessibility for all students. Address technology delivery.

**2. Science assessments for spring 2018, aligned to legacy science standards**

Describe how you would address the testing requirements for science in spring 2018, while highlighting tools and accommodations that ensure accessibility for all students. Address technology delivery.

**3. Science assessments for spring 2019, aligned to Nebraska College and Career Ready science standards**

Describe how you would address the testing requirements for science related to the assessment of three-dimensional standards based off the science education framework in spring 2019, while highlighting tools and accommodations that ensure accessibility for all students. Address technology delivery.

**4. ELA and mathematics Alternate Assessment for spring 2018, aligned to Nebraska College and Career Ready Extended ELA and math standards**

Describe how you would address the summative testing requirements for ELA and mathematics in spring 2018, while highlighting tools and accommodations that ensure accessibility for all students. Address technology delivery.

**5. Science Alternate assessments for spring 2018, aligned to extended legacy science standards**

Describe how you would address the testing requirements for science in spring 2018, while highlighting tools and accommodations that ensure accessibility for all students. Address technology delivery.

**6. Science alternate assessments for spring 2019, aligned to Nebraska College and Career Ready extended science standards**

Describe how you would address the testing requirements for science in spring 2019, while highlighting tools and accommodations that ensure accessibility for all students. Address technology delivery.

**7. Alignment with Nebraska standards**

Describe how the proposed assessments are aligned to the Nebraska standards and how that alignment would be demonstrated.

**8. Scoring & Reporting**

Describe how any constructed response items will be scored, what reports will be able to be provided, the level of information that will be provided on the reports, and the timeline and delivery method of the reports. Address methods for expedient delivery of scores to students, school/district personnel, and parents.

**9. Student demographic, participation and enrollment data**

Describe how student enrollment data would be submitted by districts and how this will be incorporated and validated with the demographic and participation data collected by NDE, while highlighting how student confidentiality is maintained.

**10. Branding**

Describe a broad overview that demonstrates your capacity and experience in brand development and how you will partner with NDE to develop a logo and assessment name that aligns with the vision of Assessment within AQuESTT.

**11. Communication**

Describe how you would provide communication and/or provide samples of communications developed to support statewide testing that inform students, parents, teachers, administrators, school counselors, and public about statewide testing.

**12. Interim Assessment System:**

Describe the statewide interim system to support learning of Nebraska State Standards you can provide.

**13. Professional Development**

Describe how you would provide professional development to support a balanced assessment system and assessment literacy in Nebraska.

**14. Technology-Computer-based test technical requirements**

Describe how you will address NDE's requirement for a computer-based assessment. Describe how you will be able to avoid, respond to, and resolve interruptions and technology issues in online testing. Indicate if you are giving information about providing ONLY the test engine or the test engine along with components 1-9 above.

**15. Paper-based test administration**

Describe how your paper-based assessment will meet the needs of Nebraska.

**16. Training, support, and test security**

Describe what training and support you will provide to school personnel throughout school year and during the assessment administration. Describe your process for maintaining test security for both computer-based and paper-based assessments.

**17. Project management and planning**

Describe a broad overview of how you will manage the project, including planning and general assignment of personnel, either as part of the contract to provide assessments, or as an independent project manager.

**18. Future test design & development**

Describe how you will collaborate with NDE for developing, new exciting innovative assessments and your experience in taking an innovative lead in your partnerships with states to provide statewide summative assessment.

**19. Prior Experience**

Describe your experience providing statewide assessments. Vendor must include any online test interruptions that have occurred using its online test delivery system that resulted in loss of student responses, testing shutdown, cancellation or reduction of payment to the vendor, cancellation of contract, or litigation.

**20. Cost**

Provide an estimated range of the cost of each of the above sections for which prospective vendor is responding.

**IMPORTANT NOTICE:** This RFI does not constitute nor guarantee that the State will proceed with a formal solicitation for the requested services. The State is not responsible for any cost associated with the preparation of any response to this request.

**RESPONSE DEADLINE: Thursday, December 8, 2016 at 5:00 p.m. Central Standard Time**

Responses are to be sent as letters or electronic letters and must be received electronically or by mail at

[valorie.foy@nebraska.gov](mailto:valorie.foy@nebraska.gov)

Please limit attachments to 25 MBs and use multiple emails if necessary.

Note: Also send an email to [valorie.foy@nebraska.gov](mailto:valorie.foy@nebraska.gov) with no attachments, indicating you have submitted a response electronically.

or hard copy letters to

Attn: Valorie Foy

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301 Centennial Mall Box 94987

Lincoln, NE 68509-4987

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