



State of Arizona
Department of Education
State Board of Education



April 5, 2019

Dear Education Leader,

We would like to update you on a pressing issue regarding the future of statewide assessments.

In 2016, Arizona passed a law (A.R.S. 15-741.02) requiring the state to offer a Menu of Assessments to allow schools to administer an alternate assessment instead of the statewide assessment (i.e. AzMERIT). This was designed to be phased in over a set timeframe, beginning with high school in Spring 2019 and for grades 3-8 in Spring 2020.

This Arizona law is at odds with the current federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) law that requires all schools to take the same statewide assessment for academic accountability. In December 2018, the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) made a request to the U.S. Department of Education (US ED) asking to waive certain federal requirements as they pertain to the Menu of Assessments. Last week, ADE received notification from the US ED that this waiver request was denied (letter attached).

What is the impact on schools for this year?

There is **no** impact for the current 2018-19 school year. Implications of the waiver denial do not take effect until next year (2019-20). All district and charter schools must continue with their spring testing as planned, including high schools that selected ACT or SAT from the menu.

What does this mean for Menu of Assessments?

The waiver denial makes it clear that Arizona must have a statewide comparable assessment aligned with state standards each year in grades 3-8, as well as least once at the high school level.

3-8 Assessment: According to US ED, having a menu of assessments in grades 3-8 is simply not feasible under federal law.

High School Assessment: It is possible to continue with “menu-like” options that also meet ESSA requirements so long as all students take a designated statewide assessment for school and district academic accountability purposes. For example, it is possible to have a single statewide assessment that meets ESSA requirements (likely given in either 9th or 10th grade) and also offer a nationally recognized college assessment (like ACT and SAT) at 11th grade as part of the broader high school accountability program.

In the future, it may be possible to have a menu that allows for the use of a different assessment instead of the statewide assessment, but it will take time to meet the federal requirements outlined in the letter from US ED.

What does this mean for AzMERIT?

The current statewide assessment is AzMERIT. This contract has the option to be extended by the State Board of Education (SBE) for an additional two years after this current testing year is complete. A request-for-proposal (RFP) will begin in the summer of 2019 to replace AzMERIT by Spring 2022.

What happens next school year (Spring 2020)?

For the State: The US ED has placed Arizona on “high-risk” status. Arizona must demonstrate to US ED by May 31, 2019 that it has selected and is consistently requiring a single statewide assessment in grades 3-8 and a single statewide assessment given in one grade level at high school. Failure to administer the same statewide assessment in Spring 2020 and beyond will result in enforcement action, including the possibility of withholding critical federal funding for low-income Title I schools.

For LEAs: ADE and SBE are proposing that beginning in Spring 2020, all schools administer AzMERIT to students grades 3-8 and again in 9th grade. This will meet federal requirements and reduce testing in high schools by eliminating AzMERIT in 10th and 11th grade. LEAs may also choose an assessment from the menu for high school in addition to administering AzMERIT as described above. It is undecided at this point whether the state will pay for any assessment other than AzMERIT. SBE will meet on April 15, 2019 to further discuss possible options.

How are ADE and SBE planning for next year and beyond?

Education stakeholders throughout the state have already begun collaborating with the goal of building a five-year plan. Our vision is that a sustainable, long-term plan for assessments is the best option to provide schools stability and direction. As the process of building a five-year plan moves forward, input and feedback will be sought from a diverse stakeholder group that will include, but not be limited to, teachers, parents, students, administrators, and community members.

In addition to meeting federal ESSA requirements, any assessment and accountability plan should include the following components:

- Evidence-based and unbiased metrics including growth for student learning to ensure a meaningful statewide accountability system
- Multiple measures to evaluate schools holistically and fairly
- A concise description of what is required from districts and charters
- A statewide assessment that provides the same measures and accommodations for all students
- More timely distribution of data for statewide assessments, including options for both public and administrator web portals with dashboards and customized data
- Reduced testing time by only testing as necessary to drive program and systemic decisions

We are committed to implementing meaningful menu options in high school along with a statewide assessment. By working together, Arizona can develop a long-term plan that meets both federal requirements and ensures flexibility at the high-school level.

Sincerely,



Kathy Hoffman, MS, CCC-SLP
Arizona Superintendent of Public Instruction



Lucas J. Narducci
President of the Arizona State Board of Education