Ohio Department of Education

AIR American Institutes for Research

Questions to Inform Conversations With Vendors on the Ohio Department of Education Approved Vendor List

This document provides a list of questions for administrators to consider when making decisions about purchasing vendor assessments that can be used to determine growth scores. The Ohio Department of Education has completed an initial review of each assessment and has determined that all are appropriate for inclusion as student growth measures in teacher evaluations. This document was written to support administrators in asking vendors additional questions to determine if an assessment will align to district or school goals.

Prepare for the Call

1. Before speaking to a vendor, identify key criteria that the assessment should meet. To best align the assessment with curricula and instruction as well as fill current assessment gaps, consider working with teachers and instructional leaders to answer these questions:
   - Which skills and content should the assessment measure?
   - What are your assessment priorities? (assessment type, administration time, assessment subject or focus)
   - How do you want to use the data from this assessment?
   - What are the budgetary limitations?
   - What are the technology limitations?
2. Conduct background research. You may find that the assessment will not meet district needs. If so, a call to the vendor may not be necessary.
   - Review the service summary available on the ODE website at http://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Teaching/Educator-Evaluation-System/Ohio-s-Teacher-Evaluation-System/Student-Growth-Measures/Approved-List-of-Assessments.
   - Consider reviewing other published and unpublished information, such as the following:
     - Formal and informal reviews of the assessment published by research and evaluation groups and other sources who are not directly affiliated with the author or publisher
     - Technical manual
     - Administration manual
     - Assessment policies
     - Other information available on the vendor's website (i.e., recent reliability data, norms)
3. Develop a list of questions for the vendor, or review the list of questions in this document.

Conduct the Call

Consider asking the vendor the following questions.

Alignment to Standards

1. Can you provide an analysis table of test specifications or a test map?

   Although ODE checked for alignment during the review process, districts should ensure that the assessment is an appropriate choice for their particular needs. A table of test specifications can help you see whether the assessment is well aligned to your district's curriculum scope and sequence or curriculum map. Generally, a table of test specifications identifies the number of score points or the number of items that address each standard. When reviewing a table of test specifications, make sure that the standards listed in the table capture the key content of that course. Also consider whether the percentage coverage on the assessment mirrors the percentage covered during the course. For example, if a high school teacher is expected to spend half the course covering the content leading up to the U.S. Civil War, approximately half of the assessment should cover that content.

2. What types of questions are used? How does this assessment assess students' higher-order thinking?

   College- and career-ready standards require students be able to demonstrate deeper thinking and justify their answers. It is difficult to assess this higher-order thinking with only closed-response questions (multiple choice, matching, etc.). If assessing higher-order thinking is a priority in your district, ask the vendor to confirm that questions beyond multiple-choice and other closed-response questions are included in the assessment.

Alignment to the Common Core State Standards, If Applicable

In most places, the Common Core State Standards require instructional shifts to help students access more rigorous content and learning. In order to assess that learning, assessments need to be aligned to the Common Core. Although many vendors purport to offer assessments aligned to the standards, asking some additional questions can help you make a more informed decision.

1. **Alignment to Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts (ELA).** How have you changed your assessment to align with the Common Core ELA standards?

   A key element of the new Common Core standards for ELA is increased focus on informational texts. Make sure that any comprehensive assessment includes informational text passages. In addition, assessments should include open-ended questions that require higher-order thinking. For example, instead of just asking a student to identify an example of figurative language in the text, a question might ask the student to explain what the example of figurative language means.

2. **Alignment to Common Core State Standards for Mathematics.** How have you changed your assessment to align with the Common Core mathematics standards?

   Assessments aligned to the Common Core standards for mathematics should require students to show deeper conceptual understanding of mathematical content than they had in the past. Whereas in the past mathematics standards tended to cover a broad array of content and skills, the Common Core standards reduce the breadth and increase the depth of learning required; assessments should do the same.

Assessment Administration and Reporting

1. How and when is the assessment administered? Is there flexibility in the administration schedule?

   Think about whether the assessment administration will fit within your current assessment calendar. Will it overload students and teachers with assessments? Does it align with the dates on your calendar? Does the vendor offer interim assessments whereby teachers could gather midcourse data on students and then use those data to inform instruction? Keep in mind that if you would like to use the data from the assessment as a student growth measure in the evaluation system, you must receive the results by May 1.

2. Who administers the assessment?

   Determine who will need to administer the assessment. Can teachers administer the assessment? Some vendors require outside evaluators to administer the assessment, at times at additional cost. Other vendors may require that test administrators be trained in administration procedures.

3. How many baseline data points are needed to generate a growth rating?

   Some vendors need multiple data points before they can generate a growth report. If your district is seeking a growth score during the first year of implementation, make sure that the vendor will be able to provide usable scores.

4. How will the vendor provide a student growth measure rating of 1 through 5?

   Verify that the vendor will provide your district with a student growth measure rating for each teacher on a 1-to-5 scale without requiring the district to do any computations. Local education agencies should not have to convert, calculate, or aggregate the data to arrive at the rating.

5. What reports and data can you provide from the administration of these assessments? Is there a cost associated with these reports and data?

   Many vendors provide district-level, teacher-level, and student-level reports. Some vendors also offer many versions of a given report. For example, one teacher-level report might include a student roster with the results for each student; another might sort student results on the basis of similar strengths and weaknesses to help inform instruction; another report might cluster results on the basis of whether students performed below, at, or above grade-level expectations. Identifying the reports you would find most helpful and calculating the total cost associated with these reports is critical when determining if the assessment will or will not work in your district.

6. How are scores interpreted?

   Score interpretations should be explained in a way that makes data accessible. If educators, parents, and community members cannot understand the scores, they will not be able to use the data well. For example, if reports present data as raw scores, normal curve equivalent (NCE) scores, and percentile ranks, the reports also should include brief descriptions of each of those and what each means. Consider asking the vendor to direct you to sample reports.

Technology Requirements, If Applicable

***Note:* It is highly recommended that district IT staff be involved in this part of the conversation with the vendor. IT staff will be more familiar with the current capabilities of the district and will know the technical terms often associated with such discussions.**

1. What technology requirements, if any, are associated with this assessment?

   Vendors often identify minimum specifications and/or recommended specifications for technology. If your district currently does not meet technology specifications, investments in technology infrastructure could be a hidden implementation cost.

Technology Requirements to Consider or Ask About

- Operating systems
- Devices needed (headphones, tablets, keyboards)
- Memory
- Visual display
- Bandwidth
- Software
- Browsers or plug-ins (if online)

2. What security procedures are in place to prevent cheating, both by students and by teachers?

   As with paper-based assessments, technology-based assessments should have some security procedures in place to ensure the validity of the assessment. One feature could be "locking down" the computer or browser so that students cannot print, capture content, or switch between windows during administration. Other features may include the requirement of in-person monitors to make sure the correct students are taking the assessments, monitoring the range of IP addresses used, having test administration time windows, and randomized questions (Shepherd, 2003).

3. Will you be able to easily provide students with the accommodations required on students' individualized education programs (IEPs)?

   Think about the testing accommodations you are required to provide the students in your district. Ask the vendor if the assessments have alternate forms or additional capabilities to meet these students' needs. Make sure you understand what can and cannot be done, and whether these capabilities are built into the assessment or will incur additional costs. If technology-based assessments will not work for some students but a paper assessment will, ask if there is a paper form of the same assessment.

   Accommodations can be organized into four categories:

   - Presentation (e.g., large print, Braille, color contrast, zoom, text-to-speech audio, verbal encouragement, etc.)
   - Response (e.g., scribe, oral device, spelling and grammar devices, calculator)
   - Timing or scheduling (e.g., extended time, change administration schedule, chunk test administration into smaller pieces, frequent breaks)
   - Setting (e.g., reduced distractions, adaptive furniture, lighting, acoustics)

   Sources:

   Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services, Florida Department of Education. (2012). *Guide to accommodations for computer-based FCAT, FCAT 2.0, and EOC assessments.* Retrieved from http://www.fldoe.org/ese/pdf/CBTAccomm.pdf

   National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities. (2010). *Accommodations in assessment.* Retrieved from http://nichcy.org/schoolage/iep/iepcontents/assessment

4. What data-recovery procedures are in place?

   Technology issues happen, so determine what can or cannot be recovered in the event of a problem mid-administration. For example, does the assessment record each submitted answer so that if the assessment crashes 20 minutes into a 60-minute assessment, the student can re-enter the assessment program on another computer and pick up where he or she left off?

Implementation Supports

1. What trainings do you offer?

   Vendors may offer trainings to teachers and administrators on how to access and use data from assessments, but oftentimes these trainings come at additional cost. To be able to compare across multiple vendors, you might want to review what they offer for free and then what they offer at additional cost.

2. What implementation supports do you provide?

   Questions may arise, and problems may occur during testing. Will the vendor assign your district a representative who can directly take your call, or will you have to call a hotline? Make sure that you feel comfortable with the amount of support available to teachers and schools.

After the Call

1. Confer with colleagues and ask for references. If other districts in the state already use the assessment, ask about their experiences. If other districts are not using the assessment, ask the vendor for references. Bear in mind, however, that those references may suggest a "rosier picture" than others may provide. Other questions to consider might include:
   - Are the results provided by the vendor useful for instructional planning purposes?
   - Are the results easily understood?
   - Is the district happy with the quality of service provided by the vendor?

2. Use information gathered from the vendor and from follow-up conversations to determine whether the assessment works in the context of your district and its available budget.

References

Shepherd, E. (2003). Delivering computerized assessments safely and securely. *Learning Solutions Magazine.* Retrieved from http://www.learningsolutionsmag.com/articles/324/delivering-computerized-assessments-safely-and-securely

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