



PROPOSED AGENDA ITEM RATIONALE

DATE: August 23, 2024

TO: Dr. Brian L. Maher
Commissioner of Education

FROM: Dr. Trudy K Clark, Director of Statewide Assessment

PROPOSED AGENDA ITEM: Action Item: Approve the Intent to Award to NWEA, a division of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, as the contractor for the 2025-2026 Statewide Assessment.

AGENDA ITEM TYPE (contract/grant/rule/program/other): Contract

RATIONALE/BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

In 2007, the Nebraska Legislature passed 79-760.03 establishing a statewide system for the assessment of student learning and for reporting the performance of school districts. Specifically, this law required the state board to a) prescribe a statewide assessment of reading, mathematics, and science; and b) recommend national assessment instruments for the purpose of national comparison.

The Department may determine appropriate accommodations for the assessment of students with disabilities. Among these accommodations may be an assessment instrument aligned to alternate achievement standards for students with severe cognitive disabilities.

In response to 79-760.03, the Department of Education released its first Request for Proposal to identify a contractor to provide a statewide assessment system and reporting of student performance in 2008. The Department released additional Request for Proposals in 2012 and 2016.

- In 2016 the Nebraska Department of Education released a Request for Proposal for a contractor to provide the statewide assessment. Following the Request for Proposal process, the State Board awarded the contract to Northwest Education Association (NWEA) for the general assessment and to Data Recognition Corporation (DRC) for the alternate assessment.
- Procurement guidelines indicated a new Request for Proposal was generally released every five (5) years. Due to several factors, including the impact of COVID-19 and the hiring of a new Commissioner, this cycle was adjusted. The Nebraska Department of Education released a new Request for Proposal seeking an innovative, balanced assessment system in June 2024.

- The Request for Proposal process included an evaluation of the written proposals and demonstrations. Based on these evaluations, the evaluation committee selected a contractor for the 2025-2026 statewide assessment.
- The Request for Proposal process included the following:
 - A Request for Information released on February 7, 2024 and concluded on March 21, 2024
 - The information collected from surveys and responses to the Request for Information were used to write the Request for Proposal
 - A Request for Proposal released on June 5, 2024 by the Department of Administrative Services
 - State responded to vendor questions by June 20, 2024
 - Proposal opening occurred on July 3, 2024
 - The evaluation committee members included:
 - Director of Statewide Assessment
 - Assistant Director of Statewide Assessment
 - Chief Academic Officer
 - Assistant State Director in the Office of Special Education
 - Director of Accountability
 - Three representatives from Nebraska public school districts
 - Two (2) research/assessment/evaluation directors
 - Superintendent
 - Educational Service Unit Administrator
 - The evaluation committee reviewed and evaluated the proposals submitted by four (4) vendors: Cambium Assessment, Inc., Data Recognition Corporation, NWEA, and Pearson.
 - Oral Demonstrations conducted from July 22 to July 31
 - The Department of Administrative Services plans to announce a Notification of Intent to Award on September 6, 2024
 - The statewide assessment contract would cover July 1, 2025 to June 30, 2026, with the option to renew for four (4) additional years.
- NWEA, a division of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, will provide and operate an innovative, balanced assessment system whose primary objective is to benefit the students of Nebraska. A secondary, but very important, objective is to pass peer review requirements established by the federal government to ensure we have a valid instrument to measure student proficiency. The proposed cost for the balanced assessment system is \$6,940,947.
- Specifically, the contractor will provide a statewide assessment to meet the requirements of the state (e.g., Nebraska statute 79-760.03) and the federal government (e.g., Every Student Succeeds Act). The contractor will provide:
 - the assessment of learning for students in grades 3-8 in English Language Arts and Mathematics and grades 5 and 8 in Science through the general assessment

- the assessment of learning for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities in grades 3-8 and 11 in English Language Arts and Mathematics and grades 5, 8, and 11 in Science through the alternate assessment
 - the reporting of the performance of school districts
- NWEA is offering an optional service of hand scoring student constructed responses that more authentically measure student’s writing skills.
 - The addition of handscoring student constructed responses will address the lack of alignment the present assessment has to the writing standards. This was noted in the Alignment Study conducted by HumRRO, Inc in 2023.
 - This service costs \$2,518,671.
- The contractor will also serve Nebraska public school educators who make educational decisions based on statewide assessment results. The contractor will continue the Certified Facilitator program that delivers professional learning to Nebraska educators through a train-the-trainer design.
- The Request for Proposal process and notice of the “Intent to Award” were discussed during the June and July state board meetings.

PROPOSED BOARD MEETING (MONTH/YEAR): September 2024

ESTIMATED COST: \$9,459,618

FOR CONTRACTS AND GRANTS:

- Indicate the Funding Source: Federal and State
 - The funds for this contract are budgeted in the Office of Teaching, Learning, and Assessment’s annual allocation of state funds
- New or Renewal: New
- If renewal, date of first approval: NA

FOR NEW CONTRACTS OR OTHER CONTRACTS REQUIRING PROCUREMENT:

- Indicate the method of procurement: Request for Proposal
- Rationale for method of procurement: The necessity for a statewide assessment system to meet state and federal statutes required a process to seek bids from assessment vendors conducted by the Department of Administrative Services.
- Rationale for contractor selection: The evaluation team selected this contractor based on the written proposal and demonstration.