

May 31, 2013

Representative Gattis,

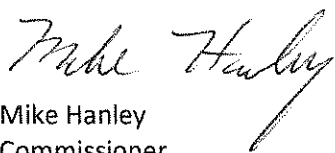
I'm writing in response to your questions about our connection with the Smarter Balanced consortia. With new Alaska standards adopted by the state board, it became necessary to find or develop an assessment that would adequately measure our students' growth towards proficiency on those standards and, ultimately, the effectiveness of our educational system. During the 2012 legislative session, I heard loud and clear that legislators wanted to be able to compare our students with those in the rest of the country and didn't want us to invest the time and money to develop our own assessment. To date, there are only two assessments that we believe will adequately be able to do that. One is the Smarter Balanced assessment and the other is the PARCC assessment. We believe, like legislators who asked us when we would join the consortia, that Smarter Balanced is the best match for Alaska. Ultimately, our commitment is to provide to Alaska's students an appropriate assessment that accurately measures progress on our standards.

On April 4th we chose to join the Smarter Balanced consortia as an advisory state as opposed to a governing state. While other Smarter Balanced states signed an MOU that stated that they had adopted the Common Core standards, the MOU that Alaska signed and was accepted by the consortia, states that Alaska has adopted college and career ready standards. It also states:

"Alaska did not adopt the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), but has adopted new content standards that are college-and-career ready, and sufficiently similar to the CCSS that the use of the SBAC assessment will provide valid and reliable results."

There are several components that guide our participation in the consortia. 1. It is recognized that we have not fully committed to the consortia but support its work. 2. We will be able to provide input on the development of test items and the test format. 3. We can leave the consortia without cause. 4. Our involvement in the consortia is based on the development of the assessment only and does not impact our standards, our locally determined curriculum, or other educational decisions made at the state or local levels.

The state of Alaska has paid no money to the consortia and only anticipates purchasing test items and a test format from them. There is no commitment to pay until we purchase the test. In the meantime, our commitment remains to pursue the most appropriate assessment possible that will accurately measure our students.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mike Hanley".

Mike Hanley
Commissioner
Department of Education and Early Development