

Alaska cancels standardized testing after Internet problems

April 2 2016, by Heather Hollingsworth

The Alaska education department said Friday that it was canceling its computer-based statewide student assessments amid Internet problems at the University of Kansas where the test developer is based.

Standardizing testing is on hold in more than a dozen other states because of the problems.

The university's Center for Educational Testing and Evaluation provides general end-of-year assessments for students in Kansas and Alaska. It also offers testing for students with significant cognitive disabilities in those states and 14 others—Colorado, Illinois, Iowa, Mississippi, Missouri, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Utah, Vermont, West Virginia and Wisconsin.

Issues arose Tuesday when a backhoe severed a major fiber cable. Testing was canceled for the rest of the day before resuming Wednesday but was again suspended Thursday afternoon because of service disruptions. Students also experienced problems Friday morning, causing testing to again be suspended.

Marianne Perie, the center's director, said the suspension is causing "huge problems," especially for larger districts.

"They have very specific schedules about which students can go in which lab at which time and this outage has really messed up their schedule," she said.

Alaska cited technical disruptions and concerns with the validity of the [test](#) results in canceling its tests for the year.

Federal rules call for state education departments to administer standards-based tests for students in grades three through eight and once in high school, but they also say the tests are to be high quality, valid and reliable and of adequate technical quality, according to Alaska's interim education commissioner, Susan McCauley.

"I do not believe at this point that this assessment meets those federal requirements," McCauley said in an interview. There is no way for the state to come up with a different test that it can administer yet this year, she said.

At the University of Kansas, Perie said efforts were being made to move servers off campus, at least until the damaged cable is repaired. She said she hoped the issues would be resolved by Monday.

"We will be working all weekend," she said. "We are doing the best we can under a horrible situation."

Two years ago, a cyber-attack caused widespread problems after test designers resolved internal technical glitches that had previously slowed test-taking. No student information was compromised, but the testing was so disrupted that Kansas didn't report 2014 scores to the federal government.

Following the attack, the testing center moved its servers, which had been off campus, onto the campus so they would be better protected. Perie said the center would again review the situation again before determining the best location for the servers going forward.

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