



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OFFICE OF THE STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF

EDUCATION

DC Science Assessment Update FAQs

[General FAQs]

What happened?

OSSE has terminated its contract with WestEd, the vendor hired to perform assessment design, psychometrics, and scoring of the DC Science Assessment, for significant errors in the work and failure to perform its contractual obligations.

What does this mean for students?

The implications of these errors will have far-reaching impact. As a result of these unfortunate failures:

- 2016 DC Science Assessment scores will be retracted. This means these scores will not be considered accurate reflections of students' demonstration of their knowledge;
- 2017 DC Science Assessment scores will not be released;
- The scheduled 2018 DC Science Assessment will not be administered – there will be no DC Science Assessment in 2018; and
- DC will embark on the development of a new assessment of the NGSS for release in 2019. This will be a collaborative process including LEAs, educators, and national experts.

How and when was this discovered?

This fall, OSSE's assessment staff found anomalies in 2017 test scores while performing its routine due diligence and score validations. Specifically, the OSSE team noticed unusual results on the 8th grade test compared to the prior year and to other grade levels. Those anomalies triggered a deeper exploration. Upon further investigation requested by OSSE, the vendor and OSSE teams uncovered broader incongruities in both the 2016 and 2017 DC Science Assessment data which made scores for both years invalid. The errors discovered were not and could not have been apparent until two years of scores were available.

Those findings, along with several failed attempts by WestEd to correct its mistakes, led OSSE to determine that working with WestEd to provide the DC Science Assessment is no longer viable.

OSSE is taking this extraordinary measure of cancelling the testing contract at this time due to the severity of the concerns with the assessment and to demonstrate its commitment to a valid and reliable statewide assessment program.

What was the scope and amount of WestEd's contract?

The current contract with WestEd has been in place since December 2016, and was for assessment construction and scoring of the DC Science Assessments, which were given to students in spring 2016 and 2017. The contract was for \$370,712.

Can the District get its money back?

Possibly. OSSE has worked with DC's Office of Contracting and Procurement (OCP) to terminate the contract. The full extent of said damages on other related contracts and investments in assessment administration has yet to be determined. OSSE will consider every option available to ensure that it recoups as much as possible.

Will there be a test in 2018?

No. There will not be a DC Science Assessment in 2018. Usually, the assessment is administered in the spring. This spring, OSSE will focus on onboarding a new vendor as a result of a public request for proposals process. A new test will be developed by the selected vendor that will be in line with best-in-class practices in test design and with the fullest integrity and detail. The new assessment is expected to roll out in the 2018-19 school year.

What does this mean for DC's federal education obligations?

The federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act requires statewide assessments in science three times in the course of a student's K-12 education, and requires states to report scores to the U.S. Department of Education (USED) annually. Because scores for 2017 were invalidated, OSSE was unable to meet its reporting requirements. When states are not compliant with federal reporting, such as the annual science reporting requirement, USED is authorized to take an array of actions against states.

It is possible some funds could be at risk, however OSSE is in close communication with the USED about this matter. Possible USED actions range from requiring OSSE to identify and procure a new test, to requiring further reporting and oversight, to financial sanctions. OSSE expects our transparency about this situation, along with robust action we are taking to terminate the contract with the current vendor and move swiftly and thoughtfully toward a new assessment, will enable us to work productively with USED.

How is OSSE communicating this to schools and families?

OSSE has notified its local education agencies (LEAs). OSSE has communicated about this publicly by launching a webpage at <https://osse.dc.gov/strengtheningdcscience> dedicated to updating the public as the situation evolves. That page also has a template letter to parents that schools can use to communicate with them directly.

[FAQs for Parents and Families]

Were my child's test scores real?

The test items included on the DC Science Assessment reflected the standards and concepts that should be taught in science class. However, OSSE recently discovered problems in the way the testing vendor constructed the test, which made the overall scoring of tests across the city invalid. Therefore, OSSE cannot be sure that the DC Science Assessment scores originally provided by the vendor were reflective of student learning.

Why does my child have to take a statewide Science test at all?

The federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act requires statewide assessments in science three times in the course of a student's K-12 education. In DC, we have adopted statewide science standards to help inform what students should know and be able to do in each grade; science courses also are required for graduation. In DC, we test in grades 5 and 8, and in high school during the year a student takes Biology. These tests are used to measure student learning in science.

What about past tests? Why did this happen now?

- In past years, student across the city took DC-CAS Science Assessment.
- In 2013, DC approved new science standards, the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), which set expectations for what students should know and be able to do in each grade level.
- In 2014, OSSE began developing a new assessment, the DC Science Assessment, to align to the new standards.
- In spring 2015, the first year the new test was given, students took a "field test." During a field test, newly developed assessment items are put in front of students to gather data on the quality, reliability, and accessibility of those items for later use on "operational tests." The results of field tests are not used by students or schools, but data collected are used to help build future assessments.
- In spring 2016, DC administered the first "operational" year of the DC Science Assessment, which means scores were intended to be distributed and used. Results were distributed in June 2017.
- In spring 2017, DC administered the second operational year of the DC Science Assessment. Scores have not been distributed due to the discovery of concerns with the test and vendor.

How does the DC Science Assessment "count" for my child?

The DC Science Assessment is meant to provide students, families and schools information on how much a student has learned in science in the grade being tested. It is not currently used by schools for grading or promotion/moving on to the next grade.

How does the science test “count” for my child’s school?

The DC Science Assessment is used by schools to understand how much students have learned in science aligned to the NGSS in their grade. It is not used in the statewide school accountability system or ratings for schools at this time. Because the scores are now being declared inaccurate, schools will not be able to use the assessment to help them understand student learning. While this leaves a gap in terms of the tools that schools, LEAs and the state have to measure and understand student learning, schools will use other methods, including classwork and school- and classroom-level tests.

Will my child have to take another test or re-take a test?

No, students will not have to re-take tests from past years. There will be no DC Science Assessment in 2018. OSSE anticipates identifying a valid and reliable state assessment in science by the 2018-19 school year. Once a test is identified and implemented, students will take that new assessment moving forward.

How do I know how well my child is doing in science?

Parents and teachers should talk to their teachers and schools to learn more about what students are learning in science and how they are doing on their science activities in class.

How can I have faith in the state assessments my child takes?

There are many policies and procedures that OSSE puts in place to ensure that the assessments we use across the city are the absolute highest quality and are valid and reliable – this ensures that time spent on testing is worthwhile and provides critical information about student progress. In the case of the DC Science Assessment, it was these internal checks and balances conducted by OSSE assessment staff that revealed significant errors committed by the vendor. OSSE has full faith in our assessment staff and the policies and procedures they uphold for quality. Additionally, other statewide assessments, such as the ones for English and math, are also nationally validated with independent researchers, in addition to the internal checks we do at the state level. It is because of the importance we place on having tests that are trustworthy that we are taking this extraordinary step for the DC Science Assessment at this time.