



# NEWS RELEASE

## Utah State Board of Education

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June 7, 2019

For Immediate Release

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### Utah Cancels Statewide 3-8 Testing Contract after Spring Marred with Glitches *State Board of Education will engage alternative provider for successful assessment delivery*

SALT LAKE CITY – The Utah State Board of Education (USBE) voted today to cancel its contract with Questar Assessment Inc., the vendor that has provided the technological platform for the state to administer statewide RISE assessments to students in grades 3-8 in the 2018-19 school year.

The decision comes at the end of a testing window filled with interruptions and other technology problems with the platform used by Questar for the computer-adaptive tests. Rather than risk continued interruptions, USBE is terminating what otherwise would have been a 10-year \$44 million contract.

In order to comply with state and federal laws and offer continuity in assessment data to teachers and students, Utah will pursue a short-term contract with an alternative provider with demonstrated capacity to deliver a statewide testing system beginning next school year. At the same time, USBE will engage in a separate, standard procurement process to select a long-term provider.

“Our immediate focus now is on collecting and ascertaining the accuracy of the student learning data collected this year and on ensuring there is a fully functioning testing platform upon which to administer the RISE tests next year and in the future,” said Board of Education Chair Mark Huntsman. “Unfortunately, Questar did not meet their contractual obligations on the delivery of these tests.”

Utah will negotiate the cancellation of the Questar contract with many provisions, including potential damages for failure to live up to the terms of the contract. The full cost of terminating the Questar contract and initiating a new one with an alternative provider won’t be known for weeks. The Board is scheduled to meet next in early August but could call a special meeting earlier if needed.

State Superintendent of Public Instruction Sydnee Dickson said the RISE test items themselves, written by Utah teachers, remain valid and reliable.

“The underlying test questions, developed by Utah educators, are still valid and reliable, but the platform upon which the test was delivered did not meet our expectations. We will be conducting studies to determine what effect – if any – this year’s glitches had on our ability to use the data for statewide accountability purposes, including school grading and identification of schools in need of support and improvement,” Dickson said.

Meanwhile, the statewide assessment window remains open through mid-June to accommodate year-round schools still offering testing. Of the approximate 1,000,000 assessments expected to be completed by students, over 927,000 have been successfully submitted so far.

Implementation of a computer-adaptive state assessment system, aligned to the Utah standards, that can provide on-demand scoring is a challenging endeavor. However, these requirements were clearly articulated in the request for proposal to which Questar responded. Of the known issues other states had encountered with Questar prior to and after the contract was signed last year, Utah requested and received explanations and assurances that those issues had been resolved.

“USBE carefully followed state and agency procurement processes and is fortunate to have in place a contract that allows us to hold this provider accountable,” said Deputy Superintendent Scott Jones, who oversees USBE contracting operations. “Questar simply didn’t deliver on our specifications.”

The test questions used in the administration of the RISE assessments are Utah’s questions and have been developed over the last several years and administered to hundreds of thousands of students. The rich data set affords USBE the ability to conduct comparative analysis and determine what impact the inconsistencies in Questar’s platform has had on our ability to use the data for statewide accountability purposes.

In the coming weeks and months, USBE staff, in coordination with Questar, the Center for Assessment, the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), and the Assessment and Accountability Policy Advisory Committee (AAPAC) will be analyzing the RISE assessment data.

As required by state law, Utah has administered end-of-year, computer-adaptive statewide assessments since 2013. Students in grades 3-8 test in English language arts and math, those in grades 4-8 test in science, and those in grades 5 and 8 also take a writing test.

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