

## Memo

**To: AACS State Offices and Schools**  
**Re: Iowa and CogAT Assessments Program for 2016**  
**Date: April 23, 2015**



State Leaders and School Administrators:

I am very excited about the assessment program AACS will be offering to schools in 2016! While we are just finishing the spring 2015 testing with the SAT10, schools are creating schedules and budgets for the 2015–16 school year. This memo provides an overview of the Iowa/CogAT program, testing window dates for 2016, and costs for materials and scoring. I am writing this in question/answer format as a response to questions that have been directed to our office regarding the program. Some documents are on our website to provide illustrations for you to review. On the AACS website, choose: Services > Achievement Testing Program > Iowa Assessment Information.

**Q: What motivated a change from the Stanford program with Pearson that the AACS has used for more than twenty years?**

**A:** The SAT10 was last updated in 2002. Standard practice is to update nationally normed achievement tests approximately every ten years. Pearson indicated they would not be updating the SAT10. We formed a committee in February 2014 to investigate options. In April 2014 Pearson announced that they would stop supporting the SAT10 after 2016, so a move before that time became essential.

**Q: What process did the AACS use to determine the assessments that would be used in the AACS program?**

**A:** A committee of state leaders began researching alternatives and negotiating proposals in February 2014. This committee included Dr. Charles Walker (TN), Dr. Joe Haas (NC), Dr. Dan Brokke (WV), Mr. Edward Earwood (SC), and AACS staff. We made a proposal to the AACS board in September. The research committee and AACS staff invested hundreds of hours in the review process. Proposals were solicited from all nationally recognized standardized achievement test publishers. Technical data was reviewed. Publishers made presentations to the committee. Staff traveled to Indianapolis and Chicago to meet with publishers and visit scoring centers. For the top assessments, every test item on every test from kindergarten through grade 12 was reviewed.

**Q: Why was the Iowa selected rather than the ACT Aspire? Isn't the ACT Aspire the successor to the SAT10?**

**A:** The decision to pursue a contract with Riverside for the Iowa Assessments and Cognitive Abilities Test was primarily about three factors. (1) **Worldview**—No national assessment is Christian, but the most neutral assessment was clearly the Iowa. (2) **Cost**—We were able to negotiate prices below the other assessments, below Iowa catalog, and comparable to current SAT10 pricing. (3) **Service**—AACS will be directly involved in distributing materials to our schools and scoring for our schools. Providing these services is part of holding costs down and, we believe, providing a superior level of service to schools that participate in the program.

The ACT Aspire is not really the successor to the SAT10. It is not a nationally normed achievement test in the same sense. Test standards were not determined by the same broad review process used previously by the producers of the SAT10 or used by the producers of the Iowa. My *personal conclusion* from many hours of review and research is that the ACT Aspire is an effort by ACT and Pearson to do two things: (1) grab more market share for the ACT (from the SAT), and (2) grab a share of the Common Core testing market. Those aren't bad things, but they mean the test does not serve AACS purposes as well as the SAT10 served our purposes or as well as the Iowa will serve our purposes. Additional hurdles for the ACT Aspire included (1) Scope—the Aspire tests only grades 3–12, so another assessment would be needed for grades K–2; (2) Cost—the best price we were offered for the Aspire was \$18/student in the first year, escalating to \$23/student in the third year. That price is for online administration. Schools choosing paper/pencil administration would have to add \$6 per student to that cost.

**Q: What are new features of the program?**

**A:** I am so glad you asked this question! There are some very exciting new features for the Iowa program!

**DataManager**—DataManager is the online platform for managing your assessment program, interpreting results, and reporting scores. As soon as your test documents are scanned, results are available to you online. Data is housed on secure servers at Riverside Publishing. Data is persistent and you can access student and class data for longitudinal tracking and reports for as many years as you remain a participant! Reports (student, class, building) can be printed at your office. The six common reports listed on the Pricing Guide (and illustrated on our website) can all be printed at your office. Alternatively, we will print them for you (See Pricing Guide). There are a number of standard reports that can be generated, and there is a great deal of flexibility for generating customized reports. This is a very exciting feature of the Iowa program! All schools, including those that choose to

have our scoring center print your reports, will have access to their student and school data on DataManager. We attempted to add a feature like this to the SAT10 program three years ago, but doing so would have added substantially to the cost of scoring for all schools in our program. With the AACS Iowa program, this feature is standard. Scoring will cost less than the SAT10 program for those schools that choose to print their own reports and only slightly more for those schools that choose to receive printed reports.

Additionally, a number of resources are available FREE in DataManager. FREE resources include Directions for Administering for all levels (no need to purchase DFA booklets at \$24/book), CogAT practice tests, and much more.

**College Readiness Scores**—Beginning at grade 6, ACT and SAT predictor scores are reported (See the sample Individual Performance Profile on our website). These predictor scores have correlations as good as the correlations between ACT's own predictor test, Explore, and the ACT.

**Online Test Administration** for those schools that wish to administer tests online—The default option for AACS schools will be paper/pencil testing, but schools that meet Iowa criteria and wish to administer tests online may do so. Iowa criteria include a minimum school size of 50 students tested, technical readiness, and training. There is an initial charge of \$600 for the training for schools that wish to administer tests online. The discounted cost per student (grades K–12) for online administration will be \$12 for the Iowa and \$9 for the CogAT. All reporting will be through DataManager. We have posted a document on our website regarding the online administration option.

**Q: Will schools be ordering from and communicating with Riverside (as we did with Pearson) or with AACS?**

**A:** AACS is developing a scanning and scoring center for this program. In fact, the manager for the scoring center is already hired and began work January 1. AACS will be directly involved in distributing materials to our schools and scoring for our schools. Providing these services is part of holding costs down and, we believe, providing a superior level of service to schools that participate in the program. Most communication in this program will be directly with AACS, supported by Riverside.

**Q: Will my student data be housed on AACS servers?**

**A:** No. Data security was an issue that our committee was very concerned about. Data will be securely transmitted from our scanners to Riverside servers where they have excellent procedures for protecting data.

**Q: Will there be a required testing window?**

**A:** Yes. A testing window is required by our Iowa contract. The testing window will be March 15–April 30 each year. Testing at other times is possible, but special arrangements must be made and a scoring surcharge will apply.

**Q: Can we just get printed reports, as we did with the SAT10?**

**A:** Yes. Printed reports will be available, but every school in the AACS program will have access to DataManager and the tools there for interpreting results and creating reports.

**Q: How will we learn how to use DataManager?**

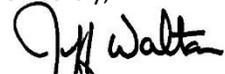
**A:** It's very easy to learn how to do the things most schools will do. AACS staff will be conducting workshops at fall conventions. We will also be providing webinars in the fall (possibly something this spring), and we will create online tutorials. You won't need all of those—but we're thinking that someone who attends a workshop or webinar and then has access to an online tutorial will have all the help needed.

**Q: What will the new testing program cost? Are these just first-year introductory prices?**

**A:** A Pricing Guide is included in this mailing. Costs for materials include a 12–15% discount. Costs for scoring include a 20% discount. Costs are very similar to current SAT10 costs for materials. Scoring costs are below current SAT10 costs if you choose to print your own reports and only marginally higher than current SAT10 scoring costs if you choose to receive printed reports. Prices are significantly lower than competing programs, especially programs with DataManager-style reporting. These are **not** introductory year prices. Our contract with Iowa fixes our costs for five years. The only area where we believe a price increase is possible is the price for printed reports, but we're not anticipating a price increase there either.

We are very excited about the new possibilities in the Iowa program, and we believe you will be excited also!

Sincerely,



Jeff Walton

AACS Executive Director