



## NJDOE News

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### Commissioner of Education Presents Revised Standards and Assessment Code Proposal to State Board of Education

Commissioner of Education David Hespe today presented a revised Standards and Assessment Code proposal to the State Board of Education. This code was originally presented to the board in mid-1998. It was substantially revised by Commissioner Hespe shortly after his arrival at the department and resubmitted to the board in May 1999. Since then, several statewide regional public hearings were held by the board resulting in more changes, which are reflected in the proposal before the board today.

The proposed code establishes the Core Curriculum Content Standards as the foundation upon which New Jersey's public education system is based. The new standards are rigorous and will significantly raise the academic bar so that all of the state's children will receive a high quality education.

"The changes that I have recommended in the standards and assessment proposal since its initial presentation to the board nearly two years ago have resulted from the substantial amount of public testimony that we received," said Hespe. "When I became Commissioner, I promised never to make any decision without first seeking the opinions of those who would be affected by it.

"During my 10 months as Commissioner, I have traveled to dozens of school districts, and met with countless school administrators and the representatives of the state's education groups. New Jersey's educators had legitimate concerns about the policies that were recommended in the original standards and assessment code proposal and I attempted to address those concerns by making several major changes in that first plan."

In the proposal made to the board in mid-1999, just after coming to the department, Commissioner Hespe recommended that all New Jerseyans who pass the GED exam receive a state-endorsed high school diploma. Under the proposal made to the board in 1998, those who passed the GED would have received certificates instead of a diploma.

Hespe also proposed a change in the controversial school-to-work proposal that would have mandated students to participate in a structured learning experience one day a week. The new proposal, made last year, by Commissioner Hespe, would no longer make such participation mandatory. Instead, participation would be voluntary for students, and the structured learning experiences could include project-based experiences that would take place in the classroom.

In proposing these changes I had two primary thoughts," said Hespe. "Number one, we must not turn our backs on those trying to get ahead by passing the GED. They should get a high school diploma.

"Also, I felt that we should not require students to be out of the classroom one day a week to take a structured learning experience. As we continue to see the implementation of our rigorous academic standards take hold, it is important for all students to have the opportunity to learn in the most appropriate setting. Therefore, the voluntary nature of the structured learning experience will afford the students the choice to pursue career interests in depth, but with greater flexibility."

The revised code being presented today makes further changes in the proposal that was before the board last year. While that proposal reinstated the current requirement that all students accumulate 110 credits in courses designed to meet the standards in order to graduate, the proposal being made today also reinstates Carnegie Units and course requirements as one measurement of determining whether a student has met the graduation requirements. Carnegie Units are a specific number of credits required in specific subject areas.

However, in order to allow districts the flexibility to pursue multidisciplinary and disciplinary programs the code proposed today allows local school districts to have the option of determining and establishing a set number of curricular activities or programs aimed at achieving the academic standards for promotion and graduation purposes. This option would be in lieu of the more structured Carnegie Unit approach. These activities and programs may be organized around an interdisciplinary model based on themes involving the standards.

Another recommendation being made today would implement more rigorous school district certification

standards. For the beginning years of the code, a school district will be deemed to have met state assessment standards when 75% of their students score at or above the proficient level in all subject areas tested on both the fourth and eighth grade exams. In five years, the proficiency level would have to be 85% to qualify for certification. The standard of proficiency for the eleventh grade test would be 85% as of July 1, 2000.

The plan presented to the board today is a modification of an earlier version.

"This system gives us the ability to motivate local school districts to demonstrate continuing progress so that they can reach the 85 percent goal at the lower grade levels in five years," Hespe explained.

"Our earlier proposal did not give us the ability to apply pressure if a district began to backslide. If a district showed progress and, as a result, received a seven-year certification -- which would have been possible under the earlier proposal, its incentive to continue to improve on an annual basis would not be the same. If its performance level were to drop following certification, the state would have little leverage at its disposal.

"This new proposal would give us the ability to conditionally certify districts that achieve the current 75% proficiency level on an annual basis. We can insist as a condition of certification that they show continued progress from year to year.

"The system is tough, but it is fair," Hespe said. "It will motivate districts to get them where we want them to be in five years. I believe that this is the strongest proposal we have made to the board yet to implement our new, rigorous system of standards and assessments," said Hespe. "

Pending board approval, the proposal should be ready for adoption by the board in April.