



NJDOE News

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State Board of Education Acts to Ensure Teacher Quality

The State Board of Education today acted on several measures designed to enhance and improve teacher quality for New Jersey's 1.4 million public school students.

First, the state board adopted a resolution that raises the passing scores on tests that prospective teachers must pass in order to obtain their teaching certificates. The resolution, which is effective September 2004, also establishes qualifying tests to certify principals and school superintendents.

Second, the board advanced amendments to state regulations that would help guarantee that talented teacher candidates obtain state certification. The amendments, heard at proposal level today, are scheduled for public hearings in July and October and for an adoption vote by the board in January 2005.

Third, the board adopted a resolution establishing new tests for prospective middle school teachers.

Today's actions are in line with the commitment by Governor James E. McGreevey and Commissioner of Education William L. Librera to improve teacher quality. Governor McGreevey's 21-point plan for educational reform contains eight elements that directly address teacher quality. Raising the passing scores on the test New Jersey uses to certify prospective teachers (Praxis II: Subject Assessment Tests), fulfills a pledge by Commissioner Librera to establish passing scores in New Jersey that are in the top quartile of the nation. New Jersey will accomplish this in two steps; today's action assures that the first step will be in place as of September 2004.

"New Jersey's teachers are among the best in the nation, and we want to ensure that we are doing all we can to guarantee that our children continue to learn and succeed from teachers whose talent and qualifications are of the highest caliber," Commissioner Librera said. "One of my first concerns as Commissioner was to address our low cutoff scores on the Praxis exams. Education research indicates a correlation between the levels of student performance in school with the quality of their teachers. I'm pleased to say that our actions today help to assure that the qualifications to teach in New Jersey will be second to none."

The resolution raising the Praxis scores also establishes qualifying exams for prospective principals and superintendents, as required in regulations that were adopted by the state board in January. The tests will be the School Leadership Licensure Assessment for entry-level principals and the School Superintendent Assessment for entry-level superintendents.

In response to concerns that some talented teacher candidates have been denied certification because they did not meet either the grade-point average criterion or the Praxis cutoff score criterion, the state board reviewed proposed regulations that would establish a process whereby teacher candidates who fall short in one area may still meet certification qualifications if they excel in the other.

For example, teacher candidates who have maintained a grade point average in college below the state required 2.75 but have at least a 2.50 grant point average, will be considered to have met the requirement if their score on the Praxis exam is at least 10 percent or higher above the cutoff score, effective September 1, 2004.

Alternatively, effective September 1, 2004, a teacher candidate who falls short of the Praxis cutoff by 5 percent or less can still meet certification requirements if the candidate's college grade point average is at least 3.50.

"Combining these two criteria is a more reliable way to determine the over-all quality of the people who will be working with our children in the classroom," Commissioner Librera said.

"We believe these measures will strike an appropriate balance between ensuring that New Jersey schools can hire new teachers from a pool of highly qualified professionals without adversely affecting the supply," said Richard C. Ten Eyck, assistant commissioner for the Division of Educational Programs and Assessment.

Ten Eyck said that if the amended regulations are adopted, the Department of Education will review the impact of them annually and report to the board.

"Our intent is to ensure that people who have the potential to work well with children in the classroom can have the opportunity to be in the classroom," he said.

The state board has also addressed issues that have surfaced in recent years regarding the certification of middle school teachers (traditionally, grades six, seven and eight). A resolution adopted by the board today responds to education research regarding specific knowledge and skills that middle school teachers should possess. It also addresses requirements in the federal No Child Left Behind Act for identifying highly qualified teachers at all grade levels, including the middle grades.