



NJDOE News

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DOE Announces Plan to Improve Statewide Testing System

Acting Commissioner of Education Lucille E. Davy today announced a plan to improve the state's assessment system to make it more educationally useful for parents, teachers and administrators while meeting state and federal requirements. The plan includes an interim step whereby the state will administer a standardized test aligned to the state's Core Curriculum Content Standards in grades 5, 6, and 7 in spring 2006 while the new system is designed. The Acting Commissioner worked closely with the U.S. Department of Education to ensure that the plan can meet federal accountability requirements.

"We will begin work immediately to design a new assessment system with input from a broad group of stakeholders and experts," said Acting Commissioner Davy. Schools will be able to use the results from tests in the future to adjust their instructional practices so that students can achieve at higher levels.

"The state spends millions of dollars on these tests," Davy added. "We must receive more education value from this investment and not simply use the tests to comply with federal reporting requirements. We appreciate the time and consideration given to us by the U.S. Education Department to meet these goals."

State Board of Education President Arnold Hyndman hailed the announcement. "I applaud the successful efforts by Acting Commissioner Davy and the state Department of Education to move our assessment program in a new direction," he said. "The proposed changes address goals in our strategic plan to improve education. I look forward to seeing the new system take shape in the months to come."

New Jersey is under a federally imposed deadline to develop and administer achievement tests in language arts literacy and mathematics to fifth, sixth and seventh graders in the current school year to fulfill one of the many requirements in the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The Department of Education had issued requests for proposals and had received bids that were under review when Acting Commissioner Davy assumed office in early September.

In support of a view held by many educators, the business community, and interested citizens, Acting Commissioner Davy pursued a complete review and revision of New Jersey's assessment system in order to improve the quality of the state's assessments, provide more useful data to schools and educators to guide the improvement of instruction, provide data faster, and ensure that the state's investment in testing provides education value. To make this possible, state officials met with U.S. Education Department representatives to underscore New Jersey's desire to administer tests that add a diagnostic component for local educators while at the same time meeting a requirement in NCLB to test all public school students in grades three through eight, inclusive.

According to a letter from Dr. Henry Johnson, Assistant Secretary, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, the U.S. Education Department believes the assessment plan can fully comply with NCLB. "I appreciate your sharing with me New Jersey's assessment plans, and wish you well in your efforts to strengthen the state's assessment system as a fundamental tool in raising student achievement and closing the achievement gap," wrote Dr. Johnson. "Thank you for your efforts to make standards and assessments more rigorous and appropriate for the children of New Jersey."

Acting Commissioner Davy outlined the steps that New Jersey will take to revamp its testing system:

- Continue ASK3, ASK4, GEPA, and HSPA for the 2005-06 school year;
- Administer a commercial test aligned to New Jersey's academic standards for Grades 5, 6, and 7 for the 2005-06 school year as an interim test;
- Appoint a Statewide Assessment Advisory Panel to develop a broad policy and vision for a new statewide assessment system and then translate the vision into an assessment development plan;
- Develop a new RFP for statewide assessments in Language Art Literacy and Mathematics for Grades 5, 6, and 7 and possibly Grades 3 and 4 for use in the 2006-07 school year; and

- Continue expansion of the statewide Performance Assessment Pilot project beginning in the 2005-06 school year.

These changes will have no direct impact on No Child Left Behind, and the Department will move quickly to make appropriate revisions to the State accountability workbook.

The new assessments will be designed to:

- More fully reflect priorities of knowledge and skills that are most important for students to master;
- Allow for tests to be administered later in the school year so that teaching practice is not negatively impacted in order to prepare children for the tests;
- Permit release of test items and provide item analysis and other timely information to schools, teachers and parents;
- Align assessment content from grade to grade so that schools can assess the progress of individual students as they move through school;
- More fully assess higher order thinking skills that are critical for future success in the 21st century;
- Provide more challenging high school assessments that reflect state efforts to reform high school standards and programs; and
- Provide a better return on the state's investment in statewide testing.

All steps should be completed by the spring of 2007, when students are expected to take the new exams.

Davy recognized members of the state education community for their support of overhauling assessments, and was joined by representatives of the State Board of Education, New Jersey Education Association, New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association; New Jersey Association of School Administrators, New Jersey School Boards Association, New Jersey Performance Assessment Alliance, the Business Coalition for Education Excellence, and Prudential Financial, Inc., at the announcement.

New Jersey's statewide testing system currently consists of: New Jersey Assessment of Student Knowledge (NJASK), which is administered to third and fourth graders; Grade Eight Proficiency Assessment (GEPA), which is administered to eighth graders; and the High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA); which is administered to eleventh graders. The HSPA is New Jersey's graduation test; passing it is a prerequisite for a high school diploma.