



State of New Jersey

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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October 30, 2014

TO: Chief School Administrators
Charter School Lead Persons
School Principals
District and School Test Coordinators

FROM: David C. Hespe 
Acting Commissioner

RE: Student Participation in the Statewide Assessment Program

We have received a number of inquiries regarding the ability of parents and students to choose to not participate in the statewide assessment program, including the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessment. In an effort to clarify school district responsibility in this regard, the Department is providing the following guidance.

The *No Child Left Behind* Act of 2001 requires schools with students in grades three through twelve to demonstrate Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). In order to make AYP, a school must ensure that assessments have been taken by at least ninety-five percent (95%) of enrolled students in each subgroup, i.e., special education, English language learners, low income, race/ethnicity. Federal funding of key education programs is dependent upon districts meeting this requirement.

In compliance with this federal requirement, N.J.S.A. 18A:7C-1 requires the Commissioner of Education (Commissioner), with approval of the State Board of Education, to establish a program of standards for graduation from secondary school, and such a program shall include, "[t]he development of a Statewide assessment test in reading, writing, and computational skills to be administered to all secondary school pupils..." In addition, N.J.A.C. 6A:8-4.1(a) and (b) provides, "[t]he Commissioner...may implement assessment of student achievement in the State's public schools in any grade(s) and by such assessments as he or she deems appropriate," and the Commissioner "...shall define the scope and level of student performance on Statewide assessments that demonstrate thorough understanding of the

knowledge and skills delineated by the CCCS at grade levels three through 12.” Subsection (c) further states that district boards of education “shall, according to a schedule prescribed by the Commissioner, administer the applicable Statewide assessments,” and subsection (d) confirms that “all students at grade levels three through 12, and at any other grade(s) designated by the Commissioner...shall take appropriate Statewide assessments as scheduled.”

Furthermore, in February, 2014, the State Board passed a resolution confirming that district boards of education are obligated to implement the Core Curriculum Content Standards and to “ensure students meet the expectations and proficiency standards as measured by current and future State and local assessments.” The resolution can be found at: <http://www.state.nj.us/education/sboe/meetings/2014/February/public/Resolution%20in%20Support%20of%20the%20Common%20Core.pdf>

In accordance with the above, State law and regulations require all students to take State assessments. For the 2014-2015 school year, the PARCC assessment will replace the prior statewide assessments - the NJASK in grades 3-8 and HSPA in high school; as such, all students shall take the PARCC assessment as scheduled. Since the PARCC assessment is part of the State required educational program, schools are not required to provide an alternative educational program for students who do not participate in the statewide assessment. We encourage all chief school administrators to review the district’s discipline and attendance policies to ensure that they address situations that may arise during days that statewide assessments, such as PARCC, are being administered.

In speaking with parents and students, it is perhaps most important to outline the positive reasons that individual students should participate in the PARCC examinations. Throughout a student’s educational career, the PARCC assessments will provide parents with important information about their child’s progress toward meeting the goal of being college or career ready. The PARCC assessments will, for the first time, provide detailed diagnostic information about each individual student’s performance that educators, parents and students can utilize to enhance foundational knowledge and student achievement. PARCC assessments will include item analysis which will clarify a student’s level of knowledge and understanding of a particular subject or area of a subject. The data derived from the assessment will be utilized by teachers and administrators to pinpoint areas of difficulty and customize instruction accordingly. Such data can be accessed and utilized as a student progresses to successive school levels.

DH/BAE/st

c: Members, State Board of Education
Senior Staff
Executive County Superintendents
Executive Directors for Regional Achievement Centers
Executive County Business Officials
NJ LEE Group
Garden State Coalition of Schools