

New Jersey Quality Single Accountability Continuum Fact Sheet

1. What is NJQSAC?

NJQSAC is the Department of Education's new monitoring and evaluation system for public school districts. This new system shifts the monitoring and evaluation focus from compliance to assistance, capacity-building and improvement. It is a single comprehensive accountability system that consolidates and incorporates the monitoring requirements of applicable state laws and programs and complements federally required improvements. The system will focus on monitoring and evaluating school districts in five key components which, based on research, have been identified to be key factors in effective school districts. These components are:

- Instruction and program;
- Personnel;
- Fiscal management;
- Operations; and
- Governance.

2. Why is it necessary?

Districts must be held accountable for student achievement. However, the department has chosen to establish a system that will emphasize measures that will not only effectively and efficiently assess districts, but will also allow districts to make immediate improvements. In addition, NJQSAC is needed because, with all of the competing monitoring and evaluation requirements that are placed on school districts, the department needs to simplify the monitoring of school district progress and quality by using one set of standards that apply to all districts rather than by using many different and sometimes conflicting standards. The NJQSAC system of accountability promotes equity, efficiency and effectiveness and will help build a public understanding among educators, policy makers, legislators, and all stakeholders. The NJQSAC also responsibly addresses the mandates of the federal legislation and state regulations.

3. What is different about NJQSAC ?

NJQSAC differs from the previous system as follows:

- All school districts will complete self-assessment reviews in five key areas of school district effectiveness (Instruction and Program, Personnel, Governance, Fiscal Management and Operations).
- A structured system of improvement and intervention activities has been developed.
- The system provides a clear mechanism to assess the performance of all districts in each of the five components, places the districts on a performance continuum and identifies the level of improvement or intervention activities needed from the Department of Education.
- It provides for the expanded authority for the Commissioner to intervene quickly when significant problems occur.
- It allows for the use of Highly Skilled Professionals to provide targeted assistance to districts in their areas of need, thereby increasing local capacity.
- The system provides a clear and attainable mechanism for return to local control where performance has demonstrated improvements in certain areas while continuing state intervention in identified areas.
- It rests on principles of uniform standards, simplicity, effectiveness, efficiency, prevention and involvement of the Department of Education for only the time necessary in the specific areas of need.

4. What are Highly Skilled Professionals (HSPs) and what authority will they have in the school districts?

An HSP is a designee of the Commissioner who has the skills and expertise based on education and/or experience that is relevant to one or more of the five key components of school district effectiveness. Among other functions, the HSPs may assist the department in evaluating public school district performance, provide direct oversight in one or more areas during partial or full state intervention in a public school district, and/or assist public school districts in developing local capacity in areas of critical need identified through the comprehensive review, pursuant to the procedures set forth in this chapter.

In addition, HSPs may be department employees. In these instances, the department employees will be selected considering the needs of the particular district with consideration given to:

- relevant education and training;
- relevant professional experience;
- expertise in the field in which technical assistance is needed; and
- experience working with public school districts.

5. **What authority will Highly Skilled Professionals (HSPs) have in the school districts?**

Highly Skilled Professionals may be assigned to public school districts by the Commissioner to perform designated functions. These functions may include, but not be limited to:

- participating as a member of the in-depth evaluation team;
- providing technical assistance as outlined in the approved NJQSAC district improvement plan;
- providing direct oversight of public school district functions during a period of partial or full state intervention; and
- participating as a member of the team formed to evaluate public school districts that were designated as state-operated, Level II or Level III, or to evaluate public school districts that have been designated as a District in Need of Improvement for three consecutive years.

6. **Who assumes the costs for HSPs?**

When the department requires the use of HSPs, the costs will be a shared expense of the public school district and the department, with each assuming one-half of the costs. However, when technical assistance is provided by department employees, the department will assume the total cost of the compensation.

7. **When will NJQSAC begin?**

In May 2006, NJQSAC was launched with the introduction of a limited pilot program. During this pilot program, 13 school districts piloted the monitoring and evaluation instrument. Their use and feedback was invaluable to the development of the instrument that resulted. Without their practical application of the tool, the department would not have been able to implement a system that is efficient and effective.

In January 2007, the department engaged the services of Montclair State University to assist with the required evaluation as delineated in P.L. 2005, c.235 and Public Law 2007, c.16 for the three state-operated school districts and six districts identified as Level II under the previous monitoring system. The department also expanded this evaluation to include six other school districts identified by the department as being in improvement status for three consecutive years, as required by the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*. It is anticipated that the evaluation of these districts will be completed by May 2007.

In September 2007, the school districts identified as Level I under the previous monitoring system will begin to be evaluated using NJQSAC through a phased-in implementation schedule as determined by the Commissioner.

**IMPLEMENTATION OF NJQSAC
PHASE 1
(January 2007 – July 2007)**

State-Operated Districts	Level II Districts	Districts in Need of Improvement – Yr 3 (as identified by NCLB Act of 2001)
Newark	Asbury Park	Camden County Vocational Technical School
Jersey City	Atlantic City	Elizabeth
Paterson	Camden	Essex County Vocational Technical School
	Irvington	Lakewood
	Salem City	New Brunswick
	Trenton	Plainfield

8. Does the department have the capacity to efficiently implement NJQSAC?

The department has begun the process to identify its resources. To ensure effective implementation of this system, the department will reorganize its existing resources and incorporate the use of HSPs and other consultants. NJQSAC is a high priority for the department and it will obtain the necessary resources.

9. When will the state-operated districts return to local control?

Upon completion of the evaluation currently being conducted with the assistance of Montclair State University, the department will review the findings and make a determination as to the status of the three state-operated school districts.

10. How will this system of monitoring assist the department to identify improper fiscal and programmatic practices in the school districts?

NJQSAC will assist the department in identifying both appropriate and inappropriate practices in school districts through the provisions contained in the law for early identification. The department will also utilize the resources of the Office of Compliance and Investigation to provide a deeper evaluation of NJQSAC findings and to conduct a follow-up on audits and other pertinent indicators.

11. What are the next steps for all districts?

There are several activities that district administrators can do prior to the full implementation of the NJQSAC monitoring and evaluation system statewide. Some of these activities include:

- Review the legislation;
- Review the administrative code; and
- Communicate the anticipated changes to local boards of education, other school administrators and to the community.