



New Jersey School Boards Association

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**Testimony before the
State Board of Education
N.J.A.C. 6A:8
Standards and Assessment**

At the heart of the New Jersey School Boards Association's (NJSBA) mission is the advancement of the achievement of *all* students through effective school district governance. We are pleased to share with the State Board of Education our beliefs on the role assessment has in student achievement.

Graduation Requirements

The NJSBA believes that local boards of education should be able to set local graduation requirements that complement those of the state. Further, we believe that all students who meet local and State requirements for graduation should be granted a state-endorsed diploma. This applies not only to students in general education programs, but also to special education, bilingual and limited English proficient students.

Special Education

Special education students should be included in the state assessment system. However, in measuring their progress toward state standards, we also have to apply assessment in a way that affords these students the opportunity to meet their full potential.

Therefore, the state assessment system should reflect the following principles:

1. A district's accountability for the proficiency of special education students should be based on incremental progress against standards that take into account the special challenges faced by these students.

2. Remedial action that may be required of a school or district because special education students did not achieve proficiency goals should be directed exclusively at those students.
3. When assessing students with disabilities, federal and state authorities should adopt a flexible approach that will yield useful data on student growth and the effectiveness of the student's educational program. IEP teams should determine whether a student with disabilities takes the general education assessment or some alternative assessment based on the student's developmental and pedagogical progress, not necessarily on the student's chronological grade level.

State Assessment

The NJSBA believes that a uniform statewide test or an alternative method of measurement should be used as the basic method of assessing whether students have met state and federal standards. These assessments should:

1. Be accurate, valid, and reliable measures of whether or not the student has mastered New Jersey's standards;
2. Measure skills appropriate for graduation (i.e., those skills commonly considered essential for functioning as an adult in society);
3. Provide the district, the schools and the teaching staff with information that can be used to identify the need for remedial intervention as well as the opportunity for advanced or accelerated work, and
4. Be designed to ensure that all students have the opportunity, assistance and incentives to meet the state's academic standards.

The NJSBA believes the state should provide alternative methods of achieving state and federal requirements for graduation such as the Alternate High School Assessment or portfolio assessment. The NJSBA further believes that parents should have input into decisions regarding the methods of assessment used, but that the ultimate authority to decide these methods must rest with local boards of education. Methods of alternative assessment include the SAT, ASVAB and Accuplacer, among others.

The NJSBA supports these proposed changes to the Standards and Assessment code. These changes represent a first step in this process of transition toward a new vision of standardized testing for our schools. The proposal maintain New Jersey's strong accountability system and state compliance with federal requirements set forth in the Every Student Succeeds Act. The proposal continues to focus on student growth in grades 3 through 8, yet tailors a more targeted approach to the diverse student learning needs at the high school level. The proposal maintains a strong focus on the use of timely, actionable data for educators, students and parents to inform each student's learning. A clarification and streamlining of high school graduation requirements will maintain New Jersey's high school proficiency standards, but also result in increased instructional time and increased opportunities for students to explore other areas of interest.

In closing, the NJSBA looks forward to working collaboratively with the State Board of Education and the Department as we continue on our path to develop our next generation of state assessments that is relevant to students, aligned to our curriculum, and data-rich to assist educators in refining their instructional approaches to meet student needs. Thank you for your commitment to all New Jersey students.