

**State Board of Education, March 19, 2008**

**Special Review Assessment (SRA): Additional information concerning districts with high SRA usage rates**

**Prepared by Office of State Assessments**

In response to the department's proposed resolution concerning the Special Review Assessment (SRA), the State Board has requested additional information about districts in which a high proportion of graduating seniors use the SRA to satisfy, in whole or in part, their high school graduation test requirement. State Board members also asked for information about any correlation between the SRA and dropout rates.

This document responds to those requests.

Attached to this summary is an Excel chart listing high schools in which 25% or more graduating seniors used the SRA in 2007 to meet their HSPA requirement. High schools attaining a 50% or greater SRA rate in 2007 are listed in bold type.

The chart shows corresponding percentages for 2005 and 2006, as well the numbers of 12<sup>th</sup> graders each year, the dropout rates for these schools for these years, and whether the schools are in "Abbott" districts; finally, the AYP and QSAC status (if any) of each school is shown as well.

*Note:* The district SRA usage and dropout rate data are drawn from the 2007 New Jersey School Report Card, which uses for these categories data supplied by local districts; in some cases, this self-reported data appears flawed, partial, or is missing altogether. For the most part, however, the information is robust enough to provide useful additional context for consideration of the department's current proposal for retaining and enhancing an alternate mechanism for satisfying the state high school graduation test requirement.

The following observations may be noted:

- The state average for SRA usage in 2007 was 11.8%;
- There are 24 school districts and 53 high schools on this list, with 12 of the state's 21 counties represented;
- Eight of the nine secondary charter schools appear on this list;
- High schools that have high SRA usage rates generally have higher dropout rates;

- Abbott district high schools generally have high SRA usage rates and higher dropout rates; thirteen Abbott and eleven non-Abbott districts are represented on this list;
- Most of the schools represented here have an AYP status of School in Need of Improvement (SINI), and/or the district status is District in Need of Improvement (DINI); only 7 of the listed schools/districts have never been designated for AYP as SINI, and/or DINI;
- Twelve of the thirteen school districts in their third year of DINI are on this list;
- All the districts included in Phase 1 of the Implementation of NJQSAC are listed except for Salem City;
- While the number of students statewide who used the SRA to graduate in 2007 dropped to 11,747 from 13,288 in 2006 and from a high of 15,669 in 2005, high schools on the attached list – that is, heavy users of the SRA – did not generally experience a reduction in their SRA rates. Newark is the most notable exception: four of the seven Newark high schools on this list show a reduction in their SRA rates; however, the West Side High School’s SRA rate climbed from 48.9% in 2006 to 74.4% in 2007;
- Of the 374 secondary schools that administered the HSPA in 2006-2007, 317 had students who graduated through the SRA process during the 2006-2007 school year; of the 317 high schools involved in the SRA process, 53 of these high schools had 25% or more of their students graduate via SRA in the 2006-2007 school year, and twelve of the 53 high schools had more than 50% of their students graduate via the SRA.

As noted in the *Standards and Expectations* discussion paper (page 8), current research does not suggest that there is a definitive causal relationship between high school graduation tests and dropout rates. Summarizing a study of the relationship between the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment of Skills (MCAS) and dropout rates in that state, the Center on Education Policy’s 2006 report, *State High School Exit Exams: A Challenging Year*, states as follows: “It appears that MCAS is a factor in the Massachusetts dropout rate, but not a major one. Local officials see it as a hurdle, but it pales in comparison to other dropout factors such as attendance, family, and work pressures” (page 66).

The implications of this study for New Jersey’s SRA policy are not clear: the CEP analysis would suggest that the HSPA is not a major motivation for student dropouts; however, as an alternate mechanism for satisfying the state graduation test requirement, the SRA serves a more concentrated population of students at risk of not graduating. There is certainly anecdotal evidence that many districts fear that elimination

of the SRA would increase dropout rates. The department's proposal for an enhanced SRA-like mechanism rests primarily on the argument that it is sound policy and sound measurement practice to rely on multiple measures to certify graduation decisions.

A State Board member requested an expanded version of a slide from the PowerPoint presentation *2007 New Jersey Statewide Assessment Results: Highlights and Trends*, which had been presented earlier in the meeting. Specifically, the board member requested that the Excel graph on slide #16 of that presentation be modified to represent Abbott district math performance in relation to total statewide math performance, for all students and for subgroups. That revised graph is appended here.

Finally, this report appends two documents summarizing the performance of grade 12 students on the October 2007 HSPA administration. This is a retest administration only, for students who had previously failed to demonstrate proficiency on one or both content areas of the HSPA. Thus, the students who fail the October 2007 retest administration constitute the core SRA student population for the 2007-2008 school year, although these students have an additional opportunity with the March 2008 HSPA administration. As these October 2007 summaries show, out of 19,418 valid scale scores in mathematics, 12,284 (63.3%) were partially proficient, while 4994 (48.1%) out of 10,386 valid scale scores in language arts literacy were partially proficient. Almost twice as many students must retake the HSPA in math as in LAL, and more than twice as many fail the October retest in math as in LAL. This suggests that the SRA "problem," is a math education problem in particular, and that an enhanced SRA-like alternate assessment program must take that fact into account.

Attachment  
JD/TP 3-5-08