

May 13, 2005

TO: Members, State Board of Education

FROM: William L. Librera, Ed.D.  
Commissioner

SUBJECT: **Elimination of State Special Review Assessment (SRA)**

Approximately 18 months ago, the Department of Education issued and circulated a white paper on the Special Review Assessment (SRA). The white paper concluded that the SRA had evolved from a program designed to serve a small number of students who, because of special needs or extraordinary circumstance, could not pass the High School Proficiency Test (HSPT) into an alternate statewide test that enabled approximately 20 percent of the high school senior students each year to get diplomas, without having passed the regular state graduation test.

This evolution went well beyond the original intent, and the present results suggest that approximately one-fifth of our students are unable to meet the state requirement for a diploma. This raises disturbing questions and conclusions about the ability of a large portion of our students to learn and to master important content. Today, after 18 months of review and experiences with our summer institutes, our conclusions are no different. The SRA hurts the very students we seek to help, and it must be replaced.

We recommend the replacement of the SRA with a well-informed set of approaches that support student learning. It is evident that students require different approaches to the literacy and mathematics state tests. These approaches need to be driven by best practices as many of our high schools have demonstrated important progress with students who have initial difficulty with the test. We also need more assertive measures and program responses in each district to students who give clear indication on the eighth grade test, that unless significant changes occur, they will not pass the high school graduation test. To these ends we need to have more opportunities, not fewer for students to take the high school graduation test. We also need options to give districts additional time to analyze and adjust to what data tells them needs to be altered so students are better prepared to be successful.

Currently, the state's HSPA is administered to all eleventh graders in the spring. Students who do not achieve proficiency are offered two additional opportunities to "pass" the test, the first in the fall of the senior year and the second in the spring of that year. Students who, based on their initial performance, are at risk of not completing this requirement are enrolled in the alternative assessment process known as the Special Review Assessment (SRA).

## **Plan**

The Plan for the elimination of the SRA includes the following components:

1. Schedule for the elimination of the SRA;
2. Recommendations for a revised assessment schedule;
3. Recommendations for additional support options intended to enhance both early identification of at-risk students and development of instructional options for increasing opportunities for student success; and
4. Appeal process for students requiring additional options for the satisfaction of graduation requirements.

### **1. Schedule for the Elimination of the SRA**

Based on the data and information we have amassed in at least a three-year period, we recommend the following schedule for the elimination of the SRA:

- The final administration of the SRA for Literacy will occur in 2008 and that will affect the students that will be in the ninth grade in September, 2005;
- The final administration of the SRA for Mathematics will occur in 2011 and that will affect the students who will be in the seventh grade in September, 2005. This will provide the state of New Jersey the time necessary to make changes in our Mathematics teaching as well as curriculum; and
- An appeal process should be employed at the same time that the SRA is eliminated, so there are avenues available in the small number of cases where students are unable to pass the state test.

### **2. Recommendations for a Revised Assessment Schedule**

The New Jersey High School Proficiency Assessment (NJ HSPA) is currently administered for the first time in the spring of the eleventh grade. The recommended assessment schedule calls moving the first administration to the fall of the eleventh grade year, affording students one additional opportunity to pass the test. This plan also describes methods by which school officials can more effectively identify students who are likely to do poorly on the HSPA, as early as the end of the eighth grade, in order to begin remediation well in advance of the student's eleventh grade year. While the primary goal of the plan is to give students as many opportunities as possible to perform well on the HSPA, this plan integrates and coordinates multiple strategies for helping students.

## Moving the Test Date

We recommend a new administration of the test in the fall of the eleventh grade year be implemented as follows:

1. March 2006
  - First-time eleventh graders and re-tests;
  - No field test since primary test dates are shifting to October; and
  - Use previously administered test form.

Note: State costs for a second administration for first-time eleventh graders can be reduced by the use of a previously administered form and no requirement for field test scoring and reporting for this administration.

2. October 2007
  - First-time eleventh graders and re-tests

3. March 2008

- Retest Only
- No field test

4. October 2008

- First-time eleventh graders and re-tests

### 3. Recommendations for Additional Support Options

#### Predicting Future Success

An important component of the recommendations is the commitment to **offer enhanced predictive information about potentially at-risk students**. Such an approach will yield greater first proficiency rates and reduce the reliance on the multiple testing opportunities also afforded in the plan.

The HSPA and the Eighth Grade Proficiency Assessment (GEPA) are constructed to similar test blueprints. Table 1 summarizes the contents of both assessments.

**Table 1**  
**Contents of HSPA and GEPA**

English Language Arts	Mathematics
<b>Content Clusters</b>	<b>Content Clusters</b>
Reading	Number Sense, Concepts, and Applications
Writing	Spatial Sense and Geometry
• Speculate	Data Analysis, Probability, Statistics, and Discrete Math
• Persuade	Patterns, Functions, and Algebra
<b>Process Clusters</b>	<b>Process Clusters</b>
Interpreting Text	Knowledge
Analyzing and Critiquing Text	Problem Solving

Score reports for both GEPA and HSPA include not only scale scores and other total-test scores, but scores for these content clusters as well. The GEPA has been administered operationally since 2000. Thus, by the summer of 2005, there will be three cohorts of students who will have taken both the GEPA and HSPA: 2000-2003, 2001-2004, and 2002-2005. These groups should provide sufficient data to permit not just an accurate prediction of total score on HSPA from GEPA but a reasonably accurate estimate of strengths and weaknesses at the cluster level, as well as performance level on HSPA (Partially Proficient, Proficient, or Advanced Proficient).

Department staff are currently investigating basic relationships between GEPA and HSPA scores. The test contractor will extend these analyses to:

- Construct a single prediction equation for total score based on data from all three cohorts;
- Construct separate prediction equations for each cohort;
- Compare prediction equations by cohort (cross-validation);
- Produce a final, cross-validated equation to predict HSPA scale score from GEPA scale score;
- Use cluster score information to create a multiple regression prediction model;
- Predict proficiency classification;
- Construct actuarial tables showing probability of success for a given GEPA score; and
- Prepare explanatory text for teachers, counselors, students, and parents.

The part of this activity that will have most immediate impact on students, teachers, counselors, and parents, will be the preparation of predictive tables. These tables show the likelihood of scoring at the Proficient level on HSPA for each score level on GEPA. In addition to preparing such tables, the vendor (working closely with department staff) will prepare explanatory text, along with numerous examples and scenarios, to help students and their families understand and apply them. *See End Note section for an example of such a table.*

Example: Students who take the GEPA in the spring would receive notification by the time they return to school in the fall that they are at risk of not passing the HSPA by the time they are in

the eleventh grade. Annually, we would supply rosters to districts by the end of summer of each year so that schools could be ready for these students when the fall term begins.

### **Providing a Practice Test and Other Support Opportunities**

There is currently a HSPA practice test for New Jersey students in language arts and mathematics with supporting administration and scoring guides. These materials are available in electronic form on a CD from which hard copies may be printed. This practice test is composed of field-tested items and has a structure identical to that of a regular HSPA test. Use of the current HSPA practice test by the districts is at best sporadic. There are less than a dozen districts in the state that routinely make use of the practice test to prepare their students for the HSPA.

**We recommend that the department expand the use of the practice test for tenth graders** to compliment the early identification system detailed in the previous section. As we phase out the use of the SRA, we will increase the availability of additional items to be used in state practice tests. This, along with additional item development, will allow the use of multiple forms for future practice use. Districts will be able to utilize the predictive tables to insure that all students whose GEPA scores are at levels consistent with those who do not achieve HSPA proficiency will have access to the practice test in the tenth grade. Additionally, districts will have the option of utilizing these practice tests for all students as a part of their local preparation programs.

In considering long-term practice test strategies, we also recommend the consideration of alternate presentation platforms for the students. The test vendor has, in other states, developed a student testing web site. This web site allows a student to attempt a practice subset of items by content area on-line. The items are scored on-line, and an immediate response is provided to the student. This system is currently applicable to multiple-choice items, and to some extent open-ended items, and provides a credible alternative to more traditional presentation formats.

### **Additional Student Support Opportunities**

This summer, we will double the number of students at five sites where only mathematics support and teaching will be provided. The teachers involved will be provided with support and strategies prior to the summer, through a group of educators, with expertise in mathematics so these summer sessions can be laboratories to help us learn more about the changes we need to make in our teaching of mathematics.

Additionally, we will expand the summer institute project to include a limited number of district-run support programs. While these projects will continue with local district support, approved projects will be eligible for inclusion in state paid end of project HSPA testing.

The Math Task Force will provide us with recommendations pertaining to the practices and policies which will best position the state to improve student math performance. The proposed timeline for the end of the Math SRA process allows for the results of program implementation to be reflected in student performance.

## **Training New Jersey Educators**

As noted above, the current HSPA practice test is not being used by a majority of districts to prepare their eleventh-grade students for the HSPA. The opportunity to administer the practice test to tenth graders has also probably not been considered by the districts as an option. Part of the problem may be a failure to adequately publicize the availability and utility of the practice test, coupled with a general lack of knowledge in districts and schools on how to use these tools in their programs.

We propose a professional development approach aimed at key district and school staff. This “train the trainer” approach would be used to educate them in how to use the practice test materials to better prepare students for the HSPA. This approach would also include training on how to score the practice test. It should be noted that training cannot be effective without statewide emphasis on the use of the practice test. The availability of information from the predictive tables (see End Note Table 1) will improve motivation to use the practice tests.

## **4. Appeal Procedures**

Students not passing the HSPA in any of the four administrations available during a student’s high school career will continue to have the opportunity to take the HSPA as a returning student, as is now the case. Furthermore a process, in the style of one existing in Massachusetts, will be in place for students who do not pass the HSPA after four attempts.

The process will have two main components. The first is that students must have an attendance rate of 90 percent or better for the two academic years prior to the intended graduation date (11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade). This is based on the fact that although learning is not guaranteed by a student’s attendance, it is certainly not possible to learn what is expected without being present in school. The second component of this process is a comparison of a student’s grade point average (GPA) with that of his or her peers that passed the HSPA. School districts will be able to calculate the GPA for students who did pass the HSPA and took a particular series of classes in each core content area assessed. Students who do not pass the HSPA, but have taken the same courses and achieved a GPA equal to or greater than that of students who passed the HSPA, will be considered proficient for graduation purposes. The district will be required to show those calculations and the student’s accumulated GPA in the courses mentioned.

For English Language Learners (ELL) students who do not pass the HSPA by spring of the twelfth grade year, the process will be similar. However, in addition to the requirements listed above, and in keeping with current practice, ELL students will have to demonstrate skill in the English language through passing an English language proficiency test (currently MAC II).

## End Notes

**Table**  
**Hypothetical Table for Predicting Success on HSPA**

<b>GEPA Score</b>	<b>Probability of Scoring at the Proficient Level or Above on HSPA</b>	<b>Most Likely HSPA Score Range*</b>
100	1%	101 - 133
110	2%	112 - 140
120	5%	122 - 148
130	7%	132 - 156
140	9%	141 - 163
150	11%	150 - 170
160	14%	160 - 178
170	19%	170 - 186
180	24%	179 - 195
190	28%	189 - 201
200	39%	196 - 208
210	48%	203 - 215
220	59%	210 - 224
230	71%	216 - 232
240	84%	225 - 241
250	92%	233 - 251
260	95%	242 - 260
270	96%	250 - 272
280	98%	260 - 284
290	99%	269 - 297
300	99%	279 - 300

Scores of 200 or higher on HSPA are classified as Proficient and qualify the student for graduation; scores of 250 or higher are classified as Advanced Proficient.

WLL/RCT/ml:NewHSPAschedule

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