



## State of New Jersey

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

PO Box 500

TRENTON, NJ 08625-0500

CHRIS CHRISTIE  
Governor

KIM GUADAGNO  
Lt. Governor

KIMBERLEY HARRINGTON  
Commissioner

*Note: The New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) is seeking public input on the draft waiver request below that it intends to submit to the U.S. Department of Education. If approved, among other flexibilities, this waiver request would allow the NJDOE to field test the New Jersey Student Learning Assessment – Science (NJSLSA-S). Public comment on this request must be submitted to [essa@doe.state.nj.us](mailto:essa@doe.state.nj.us) by Monday, February 12, 2018.*

Betsy DeVos, Secretary of Education  
U.S. Department of Education  
400 Maryland Avenue, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary DeVos:

The adoption of the New Jersey Student Learning Standards for Science (NJSLS-S) in July 2014 initiated the complete overhaul of science education in New Jersey, and the replacement of our former statewide science assessments – the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge Science in Science (NJASK), the New Jersey Biology Competency Test (NJBCT), and the Alternate Proficiency Assessment (APA) – with an assessment aligned to the state standards. In the 2017-18 school year, New Jersey continues to develop and implement a new, computer-based general assessment. This is done with the intent of conducting field testing of all eligible New Jersey students. This plan is in the best interest of all our students, teachers and schools statewide, and is consistent with the successful implementation of the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) Assessments and Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM) Alternate Assessment for English language arts/literacy and mathematics.

As described in Section 8401 of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) is requesting a one-year waiver that will allow New Jersey to not double test or report student test scores for the 2017-18 school year during the administration of the field test of the New Jersey Student Learning Assessment–Science (NJSLSA-S). The approval of the waiver request would allow New Jersey to:

- Field test a new assessment aligned to the NJSLS-S, the NJSLSA-S, without having to double-test all eligible students.
- Forgo the administration of the former science tests, the NJASK, the NJBCT, and the APA, which are based on outdated science standards, and provide a signal to New Jersey educators to transition their daily classroom instruction from the previous science content standards to the new NJSLS-S.

- Temporarily suspend the required reporting of individual student scores for the 2017-18 school year for the NJSLA-S field test. New Jersey still intends to provide student participation rates at school-, district- and county-levels for the field test to the U.S. Department of Education (ED).

ESEA Sections 1111(b)(1)(A) and (C) and 1111(b)(3)(A) and (C)(ii) and (v)(II) require each state to establish student academic achievement standards in science and to implement high-quality, yearly student academic assessments in science that are aligned with those standards to measure student achievement and to inform instruction. Further, ESEA sections 1111(b)(3)(C)(xii) and (xv) and 1111(h)(1)(C)(i) and (2)(B) require states to provide individual student reports to parents, teachers and principals and to include the results of science assessments on state and local report cards. New Jersey requests a waiver of these requirements so that any eligible student enrolled in a New Jersey public school will be permitted to take only the NJSLA-S field test as the science assessment. The waiver will ensure that students already receiving instruction aligned with the new NJSLS-S will not lose valuable instruction time in preparation for tests aligned with outdated science standards-tests yielding results with no educational benefit for students, teachers or parents. It will also reduce the potential stress and psychological impact of extended standardized testing on students. Allowing New Jersey schools to avoid the administration of double science testing will provide students with the opportunity to become familiar with the new computer-based assessment in science with no undue concerns about immediate academic consequence. Students will experience the new NJSLS-S-aligned item types and functionality and will benefit from engaging with the new items aligned with the NJSLS-S.

In addition to validity and fairness, the application of testing-industry standards and practices to any new assessment system through field testing ensures the reliability of the assessments and improves the quality and meaning of their results. The sophistication and complexity of the NJSLS-S requires New Jersey to develop assessments that are not only aligned with the NJSLS-S, but also meet the requirements set forth by the American Educational Research Association, the American Psychological Association, and the National Council on Measurement in Education in the Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing (Standards). As directed in Section 3 of the Standards, all aspects of test development, including test design, validation, development, administration and scoring, should be considered to ensure fairness in testing. In accordance with these provisions, the NJDOE will document all activities related to the development of the science assessments and provide all necessary documentation for peer review. Furthermore, New Jersey's plan for the NJSLA-S test development will:

- Provide students, schools and districts with the opportunity to gain exposure to the NJSLA-S.
- Meet the federally required 95 percent participation rate for the state for tests administered once in grades 3-5, once in grades 6-9, and once in grades 10-12.
- Provide high-quality test items and valuable feedback on the item types and functionality for the NJSLA-S.

The timeline for the implementation of NJSLA-S is shown in Table 1:

*Table 1: Implementation of NJSLA-S*

<b>Year</b>	<b>NJSLA-S Phase</b>
2017-18	Field Test
2018-19	Operational Test - Baseline Data
2019-20	Operational Test

The NJDOE hereby assures that if it is granted the requested waiver:

- The NJDOE will properly notify all LEAs and schools of their required participation in the field test.
- The NJDOE and its local educational agencies (LEAs) will ensure eligible students participate in the NJSLA-S field test.
- The NJDOE will ensure parents and guardians of students in each school participating in the field test of the NJSLA-S will be notified of the school's participation.
- The NJDOE will provide access to sample test items to expose all stakeholders to the nature of the NJSLA-S-aligned items, to support teaching and learning, and prepare for the new assessments, in accordance with Sections 8401 (b)(1)(C) and (F) of the ESEA, as amended by ESSA.

With New Jersey's move toward full implementation of the NJSLA-S, the NJDOE hopes the ED will continue to support our commitment to improve educational opportunities for all of New Jersey's students, just as the ED did in 2014 during the state's transition to computer-based PARCC assessments aligned with the New Jersey Student Learning Standards.

Please email [essa@doe.state.nj.us](mailto:essa@doe.state.nj.us) if you have any questions or need additional information.

Sincerely,

Kimberley Harrington  
Commissioner