



## **NJDOE News**

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### **State Board of Education Establishes Proficiency Levels for New Eighth Grade Test**

The State Board of Education today adopted a resolution establishing proficiency levels for New Jersey's new Grade Eight Proficiency Assessment (GEPA). The test, administered for the first time this year, currently measures student performance in the areas of language arts literacy and mathematics.

"The board's action today is a necessary step towards fulfilling our commitment to ensure that students possess essential knowledge and skills," said Commissioner of Education David Hespe. "The test is linked directly to our state academic standards as described in our Core Curriculum Content Standards. Over the next several years, the test will be expanded to reflect the standards in different content areas after they are formally introduced in the schools," he said.

The GEPA, which this year replaced the Grade 8 Early Warning Test, was administered to nearly 90,000 eighth graders in March 1999. Local school leaders use the results to determine appropriate instruction based on students' performance. It is also used at the local level to ensure that the curriculum prepares students for the skills and knowledge that they must demonstrate on the exam.

Ellen Schechter, assistant commissioner for the Division of Academic and Career Standards, and Clyde Reese, director of the Office of Assessment, described the steps that led to the adoption of the proficiency standards. They explained how definitions or descriptions of proficient and advanced proficient student performance in language arts literacy and mathematics were developed by Department of Education staff and groups of educators. Using those definitions, the state-level panels of educators participated in a rigorous judgment procedure to arrive at cut scores that distinguished the partially proficient student from the proficient student, and the proficient student from the advanced proficient students.

"The judges in the GEPA standard setting study were excellent representatives of the larger community of committed, professional educators that are leading New Jersey's schools," Reese said. "Their level of involvement and their depth of knowledge are to be commended."

Because of the need to carry out the proficiency level setting process, the 1999 GEPA results will be reported to districts in August. Next year's results will be reported to districts in June. The results of all state tests are reported annually in the New Jersey School Report Card, a detailed statistical profile of every school in the state. Statewide test summaries are presented annually to the State Board of Education, usually toward the end of the calendar year.

Students do not pass or fail the GEPA. Their scores will place them in ranges of advanced proficient, proficient, and partially proficient. Students who score in the advanced proficient and proficient ranges probably are meeting state standards and probably do not require remedial help. Students in the partially proficient range are at risk of failing the high school graduation test in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade and will need remedial help.