



NJDOE News

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NJ Department of Education Distributes Parent Guides To Explain New State Assessment Program

- A Parent's Guide to the New Grade Eight Proficiency Assessment
- A Parent's Guide to the New Elementary School Proficiency Assessment

Commissioner of Education David C. Hespe announced today that 400,000 guides are being sent to New Jersey public schools to explain the new 4th and 8th grade tests to parents, how they were developed and their importance to the future of all students.

Schools are being asked to distribute the publications - ***A Parent's Guide to the New Elementary School Proficiency Assessment*** and ***A Parent's Guide to the New Grade Eight Proficiency Assessment*** - to parents of children in the 4th, 5th, 8th and 9th grades. Students at these grade levels either took one of the new assessments in the spring or will take one next year. In an accompanying letter, Commissioner Hespe urges all chief school administrators to share the eight-page guides at parent/teacher conferences or find other ways to deliver them to parents.

"The ESPA and GEPA are designed to find out how well students are meeting the new and much more challenging core curriculum content standards adopted in 1996," Commissioner Hespe said. "The standards were the product of one of the most ambitious and comprehensive public outreach efforts ever conducted by the department. More than a thousand people provided input. The end product was a set of standards that teachers, business leaders and the higher education community agreed New Jersey students must meet if they are to lead productive lives in the new millennium.

"Since these tests are new and more rigorous than those children and their parents may have been accustomed to, understandably there are some questions about their purpose and the final scores. The parent guides answer frequently asked questions about the tests and show parents how to get the most from the information on their child's score report."

The guides, which cost \$22,000 to publish, also contain sample test questions and helpful hints for parents on ways they can help their children achieve higher academic standards and prepare them for success in college or the workforce.

Commissioner Hespe said the guides are just one step the department is taking to get more information about the testing program into the public domain.

In response to concerns raised by members of the education community, the department will provide practice versions of the ESPA and GEPA to schools in the coming months so teachers and students can gain a better understanding of what the tests are like.

"Complete practice tests, with all accompanying scoring material, will be provided to every teacher in the state," Commissioner Hespe said. "We will get ESPA and GEPA practice tests in language arts literacy to the schools in early to mid-January. Practice tests in mathematics and science will soon follow."

The department will also add a section to its website that will contain the practice tests and demonstrate the holistic method used to tabulate the results. "Teachers and parents will be able to see how open-ended questions are scored and review for themselves the rigorous procedures used during the process," the commissioner said.

The state has a contract with Measurement Inc. of Durham, N.C., to score the ESPA and GEPA. All scorers employed by the firm have college degrees and undergo special training. Two scorers review the answers to open-ended questions. If there is a significant divergence of opinion between the two, a third scorer is consulted.

"We believe the parent guides, practice tests and the scoring information that we will post on the web should calm concerns and dispel much of the misinformation and misconceptions some have about the tests," Commissioner Hespe said. "In the meantime, the department will continue to examine the tests to determine if they can be improved and shortened. As long as the diagnostic value of the tests are not compromised, we will

seriously consider and pursue all suggestions we receive from parents and educators about how the assessments can be made even better."

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