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Commissioner of Education Releases [District by District Test Results](#)

[Statement by Commissioner Hespe](#)

The ESPA and GEPA are new examinations, which are linked to the state's rigorous academic standards. The tests measure student progress toward meeting the standards and offer information on each student to school district officials that can be used for diagnostic purposes.

"We have entered a new frontier in New Jersey," said Hespe. "These are very difficult tests that are linked to our academic standards. Our education reform system is vital to the state's long-term interests because it will ensure that our children are well prepared for college and the workforce.

"The 21st century will have its own set of very daunting challenges. Our standards and assessment system will ensure that every child in the state of New Jersey receives a high quality education. We have now completed the first stage of our journey toward higher expectations for our children.

"The district by district results that we are releasing today represent a new benchmark. The results not only tell us where our children are in meeting the standards, but how far they still have to go. I believe that comparisons in this baseline year are not a productive exercise because what is most important is progress from this point. We consider this first round of results from the new tests to be a success because they have accomplished their primary purpose of providing a mechanism for identifying students who need help in certain subjects.

"We realize that parents and school officials may be upset by some of these results and may seek to blame the messenger, which in this case are the new tests. Some might say they are too difficult, or that there is some problem with the questions or the graders. The fact of the matter is we could have continued giving the old tests, and students could have continued to pass them at better than a ninety percent rate. However, to continue down this path would have been the ultimate deception and would have done our children a disservice. There would have been the illusion of success followed by the devastating reality of being unable to compete in the future with other states and nations."

The subjects covered on the ESPA include language arts literacy, science and mathematics. The GEPA tests language arts literacy and mathematics. The state is continuing to give the old HSPT graduation assessment, which tests reading, writing and mathematics. The HSPT is being phased out and will be replaced by the new High School Proficiency Assessment in the spring of 2002.

The Department of Education also released today the scores on the HSPT for the 1998-99 school year. In the class of 1999 91.2 percent of graduating seniors passed all three sections of the test--94.6 percent passed the reading section, 94.2 passed the math section, and 95.6 percent passed the math section. In the junior class for the last school year, 85.1 percent passed all three sections of the test--89.4 passed the reading section, 92 percent passed the math section, and 93.1 passed the writing section.

In the next few years there will also be several new subjects that will be assessed at the fourth, eighth and eleventh grade levels. These are social studies, visual and performing arts, and comprehensive health and physical education and world languages.

It is important to note that Commissioner Hespe has made [several changes in the state's testing program based upon the input he has received from educators and parents](#). These changes include shortening the length of the ESPA and GEPA next year, administering a portion of the ESPA in fifth grade to lessen the burden on children, making practice tests available in January for use by teachers and students, making parent guides available to all schools and holding regional forums to discuss issues related to the state's assessment program.

"Many districts from all socio-economic groupings stood out among their peers," said Hespe. "However, generalizations from the overall test results will be difficult to make and defend.

"These results also show a difference in achievement levels between minority and non-minority students. These achievement differences are the same as those being seen nationally. As Commissioner I am committed to

working toward a greater understanding of these issues, pursuing all promising solutions and working closely with parents, schools and the larger community to better understand this issue and address it.

"I am also disappointed in the scores of the Abbott districts, but again, this is a baseline year. I am fully confident that as whole school reform and our preschool education program is implemented, along with adequate facilities, those scores will rise in the future."