

NJDOE News

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State Board of Education Sets Science Proficiency Levels for Eighth Grade Test

The State Board of Education today adopted a resolution establishing proficiency levels for the science section of New Jersey's Grade Eight Proficiency Assessment (GEPA). The test, administered for the first time in 1999, measures student performance in the areas of language arts literacy and mathematics, in addition to science.

"The state academic standards as described in the Core Curriculum Content Standards create the need for measurement tools to ensure that all students have the opportunity to receive a quality education," said Commissioner of Education David Hespe. "An essential part of our testing system is to set proficiency standards so that local educators can properly evaluate student performance. The State Board's action today extends to the content area of science a standard-setting process that it approved last year for language arts literacy and mathematics."

Ellen Schechter, assistant commissioner for the Division of Academic and Career Standards, and Robert Riehs, acting director of the Office of Assessment, described the steps that led to the adoption of the proficiency standards. They explained that definitions or descriptions of proficient and advanced proficient student performance in science were developed by Department of Education staff who collaborated with educators. Using those definitions, a state-level panel of educators participated in a rigorous judgment procedure to arrive at cut scores that distinguished the partially proficient students from the proficient students, and the proficient students from the advanced proficient students.

The State Board of Education set the score standard of 200 as the cutoff separating the partially proficient level from the proficient level, and the score standard of 250 to separate the proficient level from the advanced proficient level. The GEPA is scored on a scale ranging from 100 to 300.

The GEPA, which last year replaced the Grade 8 Early Warning Test, was administered to nearly 91,000 eighth graders in March 2000. 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.

Schechter and Riehs joined Commissioner Hespe in commending the judges for volunteering their time and professional expertise to set the new science standards.

Because of the need to carry out the science proficiency level setting process, the 2000 GEPA science results will be reported to districts before the end of this month. Next year's science results will be reported in June. The 2000 GEPA results in mathematics and language arts literacy were 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 11th grade and will need remedial help.