



NJDOE News

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DOE Announces Third-Grade Test Will Function as a 'Benchmark Year' for 2004-05 Results Will Not Count for Federal AYP Standards; Test Will Be Studied for Second Year

The Department of Education (DOE) today announced that the 2004 administration of its third-grade standardized test, scheduled for administration in March by districts statewide, will be considered a "Benchmark" test, meaning results will not count toward federal guidelines for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).

According to the federal government, tests for third- through eighth-grades will count toward AYP beginning the 2005-06 school year nationwide. The New Jersey DOE already counts its fourth-grade, eighth-grade and 11th-grade tests toward AYP. The third-grade test decision was made as a compromise in order to best serve school districts and the development of the test. The model used in New Jersey for the coming year has also been used in Texas.

"We're making this year's test a benchmark test because we want to provide districts with as much lead time as possible before the test is used in calculations for federal Adequate Yearly Progress requirements," said Richard Ten Eyck, Assistant Commissioner for the Division of Educational Programs and Assessment. "We are confident that making this test a benchmark test allows students the best and most fair opportunity to take the test without having the results affect the district's standing as it relates to the federal *No Child Left Behind* Act (NCLB)."

The DOE had been in discussions with ETS of Princeton, the vendor for the test, in recent weeks to determine whether the third-grade test should again be given as a field test, meaning the DOE would use the information from the test solely to check its accuracy.

The third-grade test, known as the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge for the Third Grade (NJASK3) was given for the first time to approximately 105,000 third graders in May 2003. It is set to be administered again in early March this year.

When the test was announced last spring, Commissioner of Education William L. Librera said the new tests respond to a need on both the state and federal levels to assess knowledge and skills of elementary and middle school students. At the state level, Governor James E. McGreevey's 21-point plan for educational excellence has a special focus on programs to support and enhance early literacy.

Through the Early Literacy Initiative, the state has set a goal to have every child reading at grade level by the end of the third grade. The new NJASK3 test will help measure how well school districts across the state are achieving this goal.

At the federal level, the No Child Left Behind Act calls for annual testing of all public school students in grades three through eight, inclusive, in the content areas of reading and mathematics. NJASK3 is part of the beginning of New Jersey's response to this requirement, with future assessments for students in grades five, six, and seven, to be developed in future years.

New Jersey already has a test for eighth graders, the Grade Eight Proficiency Assessment, which measures skills and knowledge for language arts literacy, mathematics, and science.

For more information, please contact the Department of Education Public Information Office at (609) 292-1126.