



## NJDOE News

**For More Information Contact the Public Information Office:**  
**Richard Vespucci**  
**Kathryn Forsyth, Director**  
**609-292-1126**

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### **Commissioner Librera Praises Independent Assessment of High School Graduation Test; Vows Further Improvements to Ensure a World Class Education for All Students**

Commissioner of Education William L. Librera has praised the findings by an independent nonprofit organization recognizing that New Jersey's new graduation test is doing a better job of preparing graduates for life after high school. The findings were released today in a report, *Do Graduation Tests Measure Up?: A Closer Look at State High School Exit Exams*, prepared by Achieve Inc. New Jersey was one of six states that volunteered to allow Achieve, Inc. to conduct an extensive review of its graduation test, the High School Proficiency Assessment.

"Achieve's findings validate our efforts at the state level to strengthen requirements for a high school diploma," Commissioner Librera said. "Our new graduation test is linked closely to our Core Curriculum Content Standards, which state the knowledge and skills we expect of our high school graduates."

"Governor McGreevey and I are committed to maintaining New Jersey's position as a leading state in the field of education," Dr. Librera continued. "Our willingness to subject our tests to the Achieve study is a sign of our continued commitment. We respect Achieve's findings and recommendations, and we recognize that much work remains to be done."

New Jersey joined Florida, Maryland, Massachusetts, Ohio and Texas in volunteering for the study, which is available from Achieve Inc.'s Web-site:

[www.achieve.org](http://www.achieve.org)

In general, the report released today showed that the states' graduation tests in mathematics are particularly strong in areas such as algebra, geometry and data analysis, but the tests for language arts literacy (reading and writing) should contain more challenging reading questions. These positive observations are offset with findings that mathematics tests are generally covering seventh and eighth grade materials and reading tests are often not challenging enough to meet college admission tests requirements.

The Commissioner noted that Department of Education staff will review the general findings to determine what specific changes New Jersey needs to make to improve the High School Proficiency Assessment.

The report released today commended New Jersey for the writing portion of its language arts exams, noting that New Jersey was one of the few states that actually requires samples of student writing as part of its graduation exam.

Achieve's analysis of the six states' tests recommend that they stress more challenging content, ask more challenging questions, and raise the passing scores. The report notes that more rigorous exams will probably result in lower passing rates initially, but will improve over time. Among other recommendations, the report recommends that states expand their assessments beyond a single exit exam.

Commissioner Librera noted that New Jersey has recently adopted state regulations along these lines, by authorizing schools to give students the option to demonstrate they already have learned required knowledge and skills courses in certain courses, such as world languages, that would otherwise be required for high school graduation.

"We are continually exploring ways to create multiple and diverse paths for student success, and we are pleased to see that some of Achieve's recommendations are in harmony with our objectives," Commissioner Librera said.

Achieve analyzed the 2003 High School Proficiency Assessment for its study. The HSPA was first administered to eleventh graders in the spring of 2002. Passing both sections of the test (language arts literacy and mathematics) is a requirement for a high school diploma.

Achieve, Inc. was created by the nation's governors and business leaders as a bipartisan, non-profit organization that helps states raise academic standards, improve assessments and strengthen accountability to prepare young people for postsecondary education, work and citizenship.