

**Proposing a Revised Set of AYP Performance Targets
and Interim Safe Harbor Procedure for New Jersey
(November 3, 2008)**

Introduction

As part of its emphasis on raising academic standards, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) has changed its statewide testing program, implementing a more rigorous test of language arts literacy and mathematics at grades 5, 6, 7 and 8 during the 2007-2008 school year and at grades 3 and 4 during the 2008 - 2009 school year. Cutscores have been set on the new tests to reflect a more stringent definition of “Proficient” and “Advanced Proficient” compared to the previous tests.

The implementation of this new test has implications for the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) component of the No Child Left Behind law (NCLB). The current set of performance targets for satisfying AYP was established and approved in 2004. Those targets were appropriate for the previous testing program, and New Jersey schools were on track to have all students be at least proficient by 2014 under the previous definition of Proficient. However, because the new tests are more rigorous and the cutscores represent a higher level of mastery in order for students to be considered at least Proficient, it is necessary to establish new AYP targets that are appropriate for the new tests, that reflect the progress that NJ schools have made during the past four years, and, most importantly, still keep NJ schools on track to meet the 2014 goal.

The purpose of this paper is to describe the new set of performance targets for New Jersey for grade spans 3-5 (elementary grade span) and 6-8 (middle school grade span) and to explain the rationale behind the proposed targets. This paper also explains our interim procedure for the Safe Harbor calculation, which is needed because of the change in testing programs. It is important to note that New Jersey’s high school statewide test has not changed. Therefore, we will continue to use the 2004 approved targets for the high school test.

New Targets

Tables 1 and 2 provide the original targets for the previous statewide testing program, approved in 2004, and the proposed targets associated with the new testing program.

Table 1 Language Arts Literacy Targets

School Years	Grades 3-5		Grades 6-8	
	Original Target	Proposed Target	Original Target	Proposed Target
2003-2004*	68		58	
2005-2007*	75		66	
2008-2010	82	73	76	72
2011-2013	91	86	87	86
2014	100	100	100	100

Table 2 Mathematics Targets

School Years	Grades 3-5		Grades 6-8	
	Original Target	Proposed Target	Original Target	Proposed Target
2003-2004*	53		39	
2005-2007*	62		49	
2008-2010	73	69	62	61
2011-2013	85	84	79	80
2014	100	100	100	100

* Because the new targets begin with the 2008 school year, there is no need to revise the earlier ones.

Rationale for Proposed Targets

New Jersey schools have made considerable progress since NCLB was authorized. Our proposed targets take this progress into account and build on it. We based our selection of proposed targets on the following objectives:

1. We wanted to establish a set of appropriate and realistic annual targets that would assure that schools would continue to be on track to meet the 2014 target of 100% of the students being at least proficient.
2. We wanted to reflect the progress that New Jersey schools have made with respect to student achievement and not “penalize” schools because the New Jersey Department of Education established a new, more rigorous testing program and a new, more rigorous definition of Proficient where necessary in order to uniformly align to high standards.

The state utilized both the 2007 assessment results and the new 2008 assessment results to modify its AYP targets for elementary and middle grade spans using the following equalized percentile rank procedure consistent with the NCLB, Section 1111.

- Step 1: For each assessment year, 2007 and 2008, all schools for each grade span and content area were rank-ordered from lowest to highest by the percentage of students at or above proficient. The 2007 assessment results were used as our benchmark.
- Step 2: Using the 2007 ranked distribution of student performance, we determined the percentile rank of the school that had the percentage of students at or above proficiency at the 2008 original AYP target. (Table 3)

Table 3 Percentile Meeting Original 2008 Targets

Group	Grades 3-5		Grades 6-8	
	Language Arts Literacy	Mathematics	Language Arts Literacy	Mathematics
Total School	69.6%	85.8%	61.5%	75.2%

- Step 3: We then analyzed the actual 2008 statewide testing data to answer the following question: *“What would the performance target for the new testing programs have to be in order to have an equal percentile match to those outcomes listed in Table 3?”*

Using the new 2008 distribution of student performance, NJ set the new AYP targets at the performance target based on total student enrollment that was equal to the school at the same percentile rank as seen in the 2007 distribution of student performance.

Table 4 Projected new targets to reflect the same percentile meeting the targets

Group	Grades 3-5		Grades 6-8	
	Language Arts Literacy	Mathematics	Language Arts Literacy	Mathematics
Total School	73	69	72	61

Once we determined the target for 2008 and knew that the target for 2014 was 100%, we decided upon the proposed target for each year between 2008 and 2014. As we did with the original targets, we did not want to raise the target each year; thus we have proposed raising the target every three years. Given that, our approach was to determine a linear set of targets for the succeeding years as illustrated in Tables 1 and 2.

Safe Harbor

Schools that do not meet the target can still be considered to have achieved Adequate Yearly Progress if they meet the Safe Harbor criteria which is a 10% decrease of the percent partially proficient in the previous year.

Because New Jersey implemented a new testing program in 2008, calculating whether a school met the Safe Harbor criteria for the 2008 school year is not straightforward. If we simply used the data from 2007 and the data from 2008, the change in number of students considered to be at least Proficient would be based on two different definitions of "Proficient." It could very well turn out that some schools that actually made real progress in student learning did not see a 10 percent decrease in the number of children scoring partially proficient because of the changed rigor of the test and the changed definition of proficient. We believe that schools should not be adversely impacted in the short run because we changed the definition of Proficient. Thus, for the 2008 year only, we propose an alternative method for determining whether a school met the Safe Harbor criteria. It is important to note that we are not proposing a change in the criteria of at least a 10% decrease in percent of students deemed partially proficient; we are proposing a methodology for how we determine the magnitude of the increase.

Our proposed Safe Harbor procedure is based on statistically linking the new tests to the old tests. For the new program, a cutscore study based on the Benchmark procedure was conducted to determine the score a student needed to attain in order to be considered Proficient and also Advanced Proficient. These new cutscores reflect a higher level of mastery than the previous program for a student to be considered Proficient and Advanced Proficient. It is important to note that the scaled score range for both the old and new tests are identical (100-300). Further, a score of 200 on either test indicates that a student is "Proficient." However, getting to 200 on the new tests requires a higher level of mastery.

Because of the differences in the cutscores for the old and new testing program (i.e. the definition of at least Proficient), it would not be appropriate to simply determine the percentage of students that scored at least 200 on the old test and 200 on the new test and compare those percentages. What we needed to do was statistically link the scores on the new test to the scores on the old test and use those linked scores for the determination of Safe Harbor. NJ's testing vendor, Measurement Incorporated, performed the linking for us.

What linking meant was that we determined that score on the new test that was statistically equivalent to a score of 200 on the old test (i.e. in broad terms, for students who took the old test and scored a 200, on average what would they have scored on the new test?). Table 5 provides those linked scores on the 2008 test for each grade and subject area. Once we determined the linked cut scores, we used the percentage of

students who scored above a scaled score of 200 on the 2007 test and the appropriate score from Table 5 on the 2008 test for our Safe Harbor analysis.

Table 5 Linked Cut Scores

Grade	Linked Cut Score	
	Language Arts Literacy	Mathematics
5	161	203
6	190	205
7	190	181
8	188	175

We certainly recognize that this procedure is necessary for one year only since next year we will be able to use progress on the same test for grades 5-8 since the new test will have been administered both in 2008 and 2009. However, since we are implementing the new program in grades 3 and 4 next year, we will need to use this procedure next year for those grades.

Summary

The New Jersey Department of Education has implemented a new, more rigorous testing program and a new, more rigorous definition of what it means to be Proficient where necessary, to uniformly align to high standards. As a result, we must implement a new set of AYP targets to reflect the new program as well as respect the progress that schools have made since the inception of NCLB. The overall goal, of course, remains that 100% of the students are at least Proficient by school year 2014.

We are confident that our new set of AYP targets and the interim procedure to calculate the Safe Harbor provision of AYP meets the letter and spirit of the law as well as satisfies our statewide objective of high student performance.