



October 1, 2019



Kathy Goldenberg, President
NJ State Board of Education
P.O. Box 500
Trenton, NJ 08625



Re: Collective Statement in Support of Proposed Substantial Changes to Standards and Assessment Code Proposal, N.J.A.C. 6A:8

Dear President Goldenberg and Members of the State Board of Education:



The undersigned statewide education organizations, representing a broad spectrum of the educational community, share the State Board of Education's goal of providing an equitable, high quality system of learning for **every** New Jersey student. State assessment is one tool within a high-quality learning system, which, when partnered with aligned and rigorous academic learning standards, strong local curriculum and quality teaching, provide the best opportunity for every student to succeed.



Over the past year, we have all engaged in an important statewide dialogue on the issue of student assessment with the goal of transitioning to a next generation of assessments aligned to our highly-rated New Jersey State Learning Standards. This dialogue was a wide-ranging one, wherein the NJDOE and the State Board listened to the views and experiences of parents, students, teachers, administrators, board members, legislators and the public from urban, suburban and rural areas of the state. Over-testing, instructional time impacts, the need for timely and reliable data, student non-participation and lack of motivation, achievement gaps, equity issues, and system accountability are just some of the issues we collectively grappled with statewide.



In response, the State Board of Education reached and approved a **consensus regulatory proposal** last fall that we believe reached an appropriate balance for students, educators and the public. This proposal maintained state testing at grades 9 and 10 in English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics and retained current graduation proficiency levels (ELA 10, Algebra I).



Our forward momentum hit a major roadblock with a New Jersey court decision striking down our assessment system as inconsistent with a state statute requiring students to pass a graduation assessment in the 11th grade. Despite a Senate legislative leadership effort to modify the 11th grade testing requirement, that a majority of the undersigned organizations supported, the legislation did not pass in the Assembly and the 11th grade testing statutory requirement continues.

In this context, we write to you in support of the proposed substantive changes to N.J.A.C. 6A:8, Standards and Assessment code. We believe that the Department's proposal provides the necessary forward momentum and strikes an appropriate balance for students for the following reasons:

1. A strong educational system is based upon three interconnected components; high quality academic standards, a strong and aligned curriculum and a comprehensive system of assessment.
2. NJ has a long history of adopting high quality, rigorous academic standards and has recently made important strides to strengthen curriculum statewide. Over the past year, the NJDOE and professional educators have collaboratively developed aligned, statewide student learning objectives, derived from our learning standards, to strengthen curriculum development in every school, a strong step toward addressing educational equity. As Dr. Arthur Vanderveen, the Chief Executive Officer of New Meridian told you in August 2018, "The most important indicator of post-secondary readiness is the curriculum and not assessment. States should be focusing on ensuring a rigorous sequence of courses instead of focusing on assessment."
3. Yet, New Jersey does have a comprehensive system of state assessment that includes state standardized assessments, local benchmark assessments, teacher-developed formative and summative assessments, supplemented by locally-chosen standardized assessments in some districts. This system provides a rich source of data on our students throughout their school careers as shown in the attached chart. The Department's proposal continues to provide important data points in English Language Arts and Mathematics within the robust and comprehensive system of assessment that exists in our schools.
4. The proposed substantive change seeks to address the turmoil New Jersey has experienced on the issue of over-testing by striking the same testing time balance contained in last year's consensus code proposal. Further, the proposal would administer the 11th grade test in the fall, providing sufficient time for educators to work with students who need additional support.
5. Forward momentum and timing are both critical to students. If the State Board does not move forward with the proposed substantive change, New Jersey students will once again be deprived of fair notice of testing requirements and placed in a position of uncertainty.

In closing, we wish to acknowledge the challenges and frustrations that we have all experienced over the past year in seeking to resolve this important issue on behalf of our students. We believe this proposal is the result of a collaborative and good faith effort to reach a solution that balances student needs and maintains New Jersey's top-quality system of public education.

Thank you for your consideration and your commitment to the children of New Jersey.

Very truly yours,

*Elisabeth Ginsburg, Executive Director
Garden State Coalition of Schools*

*Cathy Lindenbaum, President
NJ Parent Teacher Association*

*Richard Bozza, Ed. D., Executive Director
NJ Association of School Administrators*

*Patricia Wright, Executive Director
NJ Principals and Supervisors Association*

*Susan Young, Executive Director
NJ Association of School Business Officials*

*Lawrence Feinsod, Ed. D., Executive Director
NJ School Boards Association*

*Steve Swetsky, Executive Director
NJ Education Association*

A COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT SYSTEM
Incorporating 2019 Proposed Amendments to N.J.A.C. 6A:8

	<u>FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT</u>	<u>END OF UNIT ASSESSMENT</u>	<u>INTERIM (DISTRICT-TWIDE)</u>	<u>STATE ASSESSMENT</u>
	<i>Assessment as and for learning</i>	<i>Assessment of and for learning</i>	<i>Assessment of learning</i>	<i>Assessment of learning</i>
PURPOSE	Occurs on a daily basis within and between lessons to: (1) adjust instruction instantly; (2) drive instructional planning decisions including differentiation and timely interventions (remediation and enrichment); (3) provide meaningful feedback to students.	Occurs at the end of an instructional unit to: (1) monitor student progress; (2) to evaluate and revise the curriculum unit as needed (including strategies, interventions, resources, and assessments); (3) identify targeted professional learning needs.	Occurs periodically as determined by the district/school to: (1) diagnose student levels across grades, schools, district; (2) monitor/track student progress over time via multiple data points throughout the year; (3) evaluate effectiveness of instructional and curricular resources, programs, and interventions; (4) identify targeted professional learning needs.	Occurs annually in the spring of Grades 3-9 and the fall of grade 11 for purposes of: (1) school improvement; (2) accountability – grades 3 -9; (3) graduation requirement – grade 11; (4) monitoring of statewide academic achievement
AUDIENCE	Students Teachers PLCs	Students Teachers PLCs Parents	Students Teachers PLCs Parents Schools Districts	State Federal District School Teachers PLCs Students Parents
DATA DRIVEN CONVERSATIONS	<p>Is the assessment aligned to the standards and student learning objectives?</p> <p>Does the assessment effectively measure student achievement of the student learning objectives?</p> <p>How should instruction be differentiated?</p> <p>What interventions are needed for students scoring below proficient? What interventions are needed for students scoring at the advanced level?</p> <p>What additional professional resources are needed to meet the learning needs of all students?</p>	<p>Is the assessment aligned to the standards and student learning objectives?</p> <p>Does the assessment effectively measure student achievement of the student learning objectives?</p> <p>What interventions were used throughout the unit? Based on the assessment data, to what extent were these interventions effective?</p> <p>Have students mastered the prerequisite skills needed for future units?</p> <p>How will we continue to provide proper interventions to address areas of concern?</p> <p>What other teachers need this information?</p> <p>What does the data tell us about our instruction? What strategies, activities, resources and assessments should remain in our unit? What needs to change?</p> <p>What additional professional resources are needed to meet the learning needs of all students?</p>	<p>Is the assessment aligned to the standards and student learning objectives?</p> <p>Across the grade, school, and/or district, what progress have the students made? What are their strengths and weaknesses?</p> <p>Do the results align with what we have seen in our other assessments?</p> <p>Based on the data, what strengths and gaps exist in curriculum and instruction?</p> <p>How can this data inform conversations across the grade levels?</p> <p>What additional professional resources are needed to meet the learning needs of all students?</p>	<p>How are our students progressing?</p> <p>How do our students compare?</p> <p>What trends or patterns can be discerned from the data?</p> <p>Across the grade, school, and/or district, what progress have the students made? What are their strengths and weaknesses?</p> <p>Do the results align with what we have seen in our district assessments?</p> <p>Based on the data, what strengths and gaps exist in curriculum and instruction?</p> <p>How can this data inform the conversations of our PLCs?</p> <p>What additional professional resources are needed to meet the learning needs of all students?</p>