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September 30, 2014

TO: District Superintendents
Charter School Lead Persons
High School Principals and Supervisors
Guidance Counselors

FROM: David C. Hespe
Acting Commissioner

RE: Graduation Requirements Class of 2016, 2017 and 2018

In 2008, the High School Redesign Taskforce recommended that New Jersey adopt End-of-Course Assessments in our high schools and transition away from the comprehensive High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA) as our statewide assessment graduation requirement. After nearly seven years of planning and field testing, New Jersey will introduce a suite of End-of-Course assessments as part of our collaborative work with the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) during 2014-2015. The End-of-Course Assessments include the following:

English Language Arts: Grade 9, Grade 10, and Grade 11
Mathematics: Algebra I, Geometry and Algebra II

As an End-of-Course assessment, the exams are designed to be taken as students are taught the content of the course. Particularly in mathematics, students will move through the assessments at their own pace. For example, for some advanced mathematics students, this means that they will be able to take Algebra I – in lieu of a grade-level PARCC mathematics exam – in the middle school. New Jersey welcomes this opportunity for schools and districts to differentiate their program and course offerings so that students are challenged appropriately throughout their schooling. However, it does present some short-term challenges in transitioning our statewide assessment graduation requirements. In particular, approximately 30-40% of the Class of 2016 (juniors during the 2014-2015 school year) will be enrolled in a math class covering content beyond Algebra II. These advanced students are not expected to take a PARCC End-of-Course assessment in mathematics, but must still demonstrate competency in mathematics in order to receive a state-endorsed diploma.

Thus, for the classes of 2016, 2017, and 2018, students will be able to satisfy the state requirement of demonstrating proficiency in English Language Arts and Mathematics in the following ways:

English Language Arts	Mathematics
Achieve a passing score on a PARCC English Language Arts Assessment in grades 9 or 10 or 11 ***or***	Achieve a passing score on PARCC Algebra I or Geometry or Algebra II ***or***
Achieve a passing score on a Substitute Competency Test ***or***	Achieve a passing score on a Substitute Competency Test ***or***
Meet the Criteria of the NJDOE Portfolio Appeal	Meet the Criteria of the NJDOE Portfolio Appeal

PARCC Scores. During the summer of 2015, PARCC states and their higher education partners will meet to engage in standards setting as a consortium so that scores are comparable across all of the PARCC states. However, each state retains its own authority to establish its 'cut scores' for use in graduation decisions. Thus, schools and districts can expect to be notified of the 'cut scores' for use in New Jersey graduation determinations in the Fall of 2015. Guidance about graduation requirements beyond the class of 2018 will also be forthcoming at that time.

Substitute Competency Test. In 2010, during New Jersey's transition from the Special Review Assessment (SRA) to the Alternative High School Assessment (AHSA), New Jersey established a set of 'concordant' cut scores on third-party college readiness assessments. Students who do not achieve a passing score on a PARCC assessment – or who do not take a PARCC assessment because they've already completed the coursework – will be considered to have demonstrated proficiency if they meet or exceed one of the scores below. Districts should keep documentation of the substitute assessment as part of the student's educational record to be available upon request by the Department, but are not expected to submit it to the Department.

Substitute Assessment	Passing Score
SAT – Critical Reading or Math	400
ACT – Reading or Math	16
ASVAB-AFQT Score	31
Accuplacer – Write Placer	8
Accuplacer Math – Elementary Algebra	76

NJDOE Portfolio Appeal. In place since May 2010, the NJDOE Portfolio Appeal review process will continue during this transition. Districts are invited to submit portfolios for students who do not demonstrate competencies either through PARCC or a Substitute Competency test in English Language Arts and/or Mathematics.

In the coming months, NJDOE will host webinars for guidance counselors to familiarize them with this transition plan as well as publish a template for a revised "Graduation Requirements Checklist" that districts may choose to use. We look forward to partnering with your staff to ensure a smooth transition over the coming years.

In closing, NJDOE is grateful to the many individuals and organizations that participated in workgroups, taskforces and informal feedback sessions in developing this transition plan. In particular, I wish to thank the members of both the High School Redesign Taskforce and the College and Career Ready Taskforce for launching and sustaining this important work in addition to our partners at the New Jersey School Boards Association, New Jersey Parents and Teachers Association, New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association, New Jersey Association of School Administrators, New Jersey Education Association and New Jersey Association of School Business Officials for their valuable insights.

DCH/BAE/st

c: Members, State Board of Education
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