

Written Testimony submitted to the NJ State Board of Education
N.J.A.C. 6A:8, Standards and Assessment
January 4, 2019

NJEA supports standardized testing in schools when the test is not only developmentally appropriate, but is a reliable, valid indicator of student learning. In best practice, standardized assessment would involve New Jersey educators and key stakeholders in every phase of the process -- assessment design, scoring criteria development, and the reporting of meaningful feedback.

NJEA was pleased to see the Department's initial proposed regulations which served as a good first step to reducing the burden and negative constraints the PARCC test imposes upon our students and educators throughout the state. It's important to acknowledge that although the proposal did not comply with state statute, the Department was moving toward a solution that eased the stress of testing on both students and teachers. We testified to the positive direction of these changes in August, at second discussion, and again in September at open topic testimony.

With the December 31 court decision, the outcome of these proposed regulations remains unclear. However, it is still necessary to shed light on the implications of the proposal. If these regulations should remain law, we urge the Board to reconsider adopting the regulations as originally proposed by the Department.

- The board's refusal to publish the regulations in September, as proposed by the Commissioner, has resulted in inequity to a wide range of students. Students learning in a block schedule environment take the assessment either in the Fall or in the Spring, depending upon their course schedule. Those taking the assessment in the Fall operate under the existing regulations and a longer testing timeframe while those testing in the Spring will potentially operate under the revised regulations and shortened testing time frame. Students with special education or 504 accommodations taking the test in the Fall did not benefit from the clarified language around accommodations; ELL students who took the test in the Fall could not use ACCESS tests at that time. These inequities further diminish the validity of the assessment and further disadvantage historically marginalized students.
- The State Board's inclusion of two additional tests for students before publication at proposal level continues an unnecessary over testing of students. In spite of the Department's demonstration of sufficient data to ensure schools know which students need remediation from the 8th grade test, the board insisted on requiring that students take 9th grade tests.

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In addition, we are concerned about the amended language stating, “a student must be remediated in and be offered the opportunity to retake” Districts could easily interpret this to mean that every student who fails a section of the PARCC needs to take a “one-size-fits-all” remedial course, rather than tailoring remediation to a student’s individual needs. Students could be denied other educational opportunities in lieu of this course. Should these regulations remain in effect, we ask that the DOE provide strong, clear guidance as to how to support students in need of remediation and various options beyond required courses to be taken during the school year.

NJEA has *never* supported high-stakes testing for either students or teachers, and thus never supported the use of an exit-test as a requirement for graduation. This has been clear to see through our continued testimony before lawmakers and the State Board of Education, from the inception of the HSPA through the use of the PARCC assessment today. New Jersey should join the 15 other states that dropped their exit exam requirements, as there is no educational research that supports exit exams as an indicator of future success.

Phase two of the assessment outreach becomes more vital in light of the decision that the NJDOE must revamp its testing requirement. The Department has the opportunity to collaborate with education stakeholders to re-envision statewide assessment practices and more keenly align these practices so that they are truly authentic and relevant. We again urge the NJDOE to explore the Innovative Assessment Pilot, available under ESSA, to engage educators and students in the development of high-quality, curriculum-embedded performance assessment.

NJEA looks forward to working with the Department, the State Board, and the legislature to ensure the success of New Jersey’s students. Working together, we can create a stronger, fairer assessment system that will serve all students, parents, and educators.

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