



State of New Jersey

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June 30, 2005

TO: Members, State Board of Education

FROM: William L. Librera, Ed.D. 
Commissioner

SUBJECT: Special Review Assessment (SRA)

Attached are documents related to our discussions about the Special Review Assessment. The first is a resolution which is presented to you to end the SRA in Language Arts Literacy for the September 2005 incoming ninth graders which would take effect at the conclusion of the 2008-09 school year. In the same resolution, the SRA in Mathematics would end for incoming seventh graders in September, 2005 so the effective date for Mathematics would be at the conclusion of the 2010-11 school year. It is imperative, in my opinion, to act on this resolution so districts may utilize the results of the GEPA test in Language Arts Literacy to begin the necessary support for students when they begin their next school year. The same is true in Mathematics even though there will be more time to support students. The longer we wait to take action, the more likely still another year will pass with what we have come to believe is a policy detrimental to the very students the SRA was supposed to help.

The remaining two documents involve proposals for the Appeal Process and language for Code Revisions. Both of these matters will require considerable discussion and review. I suggest a six-month process in both, and provisions can be made beyond the normal State Board schedule for public responses including the possibility of public hearings. The Code Document is self explanatory regarding choices, but the Appeal Process is more complicated and requires information which is included in the rest of this memorandum.

The Appeal Process that is being proposed utilizes the Massachusetts approach to students who do not pass the test. You will recall Massachusetts has been the state, which we in the department feel, represents the best practice in the country, as it has dramatically reduced its population of students who do not pass the state test.

Our proposed Appeal Process requires students to:

- a) take the HSPA at least three times; additionally, ELL students will have to pass the language proficiency test;
- b) maintain at least a 90 percent attendance rate during the 11th and 12th grade year unless verified medical reasons can be provided;
- c) participate in academic intervention or other academic support made available by the school related to newly available predictive information as assembled by the Department of Education; and
- d) must be at or above a raw score of 180 and/or twenty points below the established cut score for proficiency.

If the student meets those requirements, then another set of factors is considered.

The student's Grade Point Average (GPA) is compared with students with similar GPAs in the school, who took similar courses. These comparison students should be those who have passed the proficient level, but not by more

than 20 points. In this way, a student who has not passed the test but has a sufficient GPA, and has taken courses very similar to other students, who have passed the test, can be evaluated as having met all of the requirements as other students, but can not demonstrate proficiency on the test. These students who meet all of these requirements would get a diploma on appeal.

The Commissioner will name a Board of Appeals (approved by the State Board) empowered to review cases on an individual basis as submitted by the district superintendent. Such appeals would be limited to consideration of extenuating circumstances pertaining to the school attendance criteria and/or cases in which school district size precludes the availability of a statistically valid cohort group. In such cases, the district superintendent will submit, to the board, a body of the student's work sufficient to substantiate mastery equivalent to that of students achieving a level of "proficient" on the HSPA.

For students who are not able to get a diploma through the appeal or through action by the Board of Appeals, there needs to be another avenue available. These students could:

- a) take the test for a General Education Development diploma (GED); or
- b) participate in an equivalent to the GED program.

The latter is something we have been discussing for the Adult High School population because many of these students are either drop outs or potential drop outs. In our discussion with the Vocational-Technical Schools, they have identified students not reaching proficiency on the State test who may utilize successful completion of the National Career Cluster test which certifies that the student has met the requirements of that test. We think this idea has merit as a potential GED equivalent.

Additionally, we have had preliminary discussions with community colleges about the creation of a special one-year program for students who are unable to pass the test and are ineligible for the appeal process. These students could get a high school diploma upon successful completion of this special program which would be designed as an equivalent.

I would also add another component to the discussion of the Appeal Equivalency Code. This would include a report presented in the fall of each school year beginning in 2005, which would detail, by high school, the number of students who pass the HSPA test and, those who get diplomas by the SRA. In this way, progress will be monitored. Also, as we develop regulations for the Quality Single Accountability Continuum (QSAC), progress on High School Graduation rates should be a part of the process that evaluates student achievement.

In summary, our task is to provide alternatives for students unable to pass our test after they have made every reasonable effort and their schools have also provided them with necessary support. In so doing, we must safeguard the integrity of the students and the diploma in this state by insuring that alternatives are equivalent and are rigorous demonstrations by students of high standards.

WWL/dm/State Board SRA

Attachments

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