

October 8, 2009

TO: Chief School Administrators
Charter School Lead Persons

FROM: Willa Spicer
Deputy Commissioner

SUBJECT: Update on Secondary School Assessment Policy and Programs

I want to provide you with an update on the status of several high school assessment initiatives and to alert you to some particular changes in current assessment designs at these grade levels.

High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA)

As you know, the department intends to phase out the HSPA over the next several years in favor of an end of course competency assessment program which we believe will more effectively measure student preparedness for post-secondary challenges and opportunities in the 21st century. As part of that transition, we are making one change to the HSPA language arts literacy (LAL) writing component. Effective with the March 2010 administration, we are eliminating the picture prompt from the HSPA LAL test, and replacing it with an expository writing task. You may recall that we previously replaced the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJ ASK) picture prompts with expository tasks as well, so this change to the HSPA test design is consistent with our larger plans for assuring that our writing assessments are fully supportive of New Jersey's secondary education goals.

Sample HSPA expository prompts, along with supporting illustrative materials, have been posted to the department web site at <http://www.nj.gov/education/assessment/>. Expository writing is an integral part of the *New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards* (NJCCCS) for LAL and should already be addressed thoroughly in the current writing instructional program. Like the persuasive HSPA writing task and all other New Jersey writing prompts, the HSPA expository tasks will be scored using the New Jersey Registered Holistic Scoring Rubric.

Biology

In May of 2008 and again in May of 2009, the department administered an end of course biology competency assessment to all students taking a first year biology course. We did not report scale scores, proficiency band designations, or school/district level proficiency distributions so as to allow districts sufficient time to ensure the alignment of their biology curricula to the challenging state standards embodied in the *Core Curriculum Content Standards* and the Biology Course specifications published on the department's web site at <http://www.nj.gov/education/aps/cccs/science>.

The end of course biology competency assessment will be administered in May of 2010, and will include multiple-choice and performance assessment components. To accommodate both components, we are making one adjustment to the biology testing schedule: the previously announced 2010 testing dates were May 17 (regular) and May 20, 2010 (make-up). The expanded biology competency assessment dates are as follows: May 17, 2010 (regular multiple-choice component); May 18, 2010 (regular performance assessment component); May 19, 2010 (make-up multiple-choice testing); May 20, 2010 (make-up performance assessment testing).

The biology performance assessment will be comprised of three 45 minute written tasks in which students apply their knowledge of essential life science concepts and processes to solve problems or challenges posed by each task. Please note that the department will not ask each district to release biology teachers to score the performance assessment; however, New Jersey teachers will participate in all other key aspects of the program, including content development, score range-finding, and standard setting. Measurement Incorporated will conduct the scoring.

Individual student scores and proficiency levels will be reported. We anticipate that students will take the biology assessment as a graduation requirement for the first time in the 2010- 2011 school year.

Algebra I

As we announced earlier this year, all students taking Algebra I in 2009-2010, regardless of grade level, must sit for the Algebra I end of course competency assessment May 24, 2010 (regular) or May 27, 2010 (make-up). Detailed instructions for administering the Algebra I test will be forthcoming from Pearson, the test vendor. Individual student scores and proficiency levels will be reported. We anticipate that students will take the Algebra I assessment as a graduation requirement for the first time in the 2010-2011 school year. Districts are urged to align their curricula to New Jersey's algebra content standards: see <http://www.nj.gov/education/aps/cccs/math/>.

Algebra II

In 2009-2010, the department will again offer high schools the opportunity to participate in the Algebra II end of course assessment; however, due to state budget constraints, interested districts will need to use district funding sources to pay for these testing costs, approximately \$25 per student. Proficiency in Algebra II is a nationally recognized indicator of college-readiness. Individual student scores and proficiency levels will be reported. A letter inviting districts to participate in the 2010 Algebra II assessment will be mailed by the testing vendor Pearson later this fall. The testing window for Algebra II is May 17 through May 28, 2010. Districts are urged to align their curriculums to New Jersey's algebra content standards: see <http://www.nj.gov/education/aps/cccs/math/>.

Special Review Assessment (SRA)/Alternative High School Assessment (AHSA)

Please note that as a reflection of the department's efforts to improve the SRA process, the name of this program has changed from Special Review Assessment to Alternative High School Assessment (AHSA), in keeping with the recently adopted standards and assessment regulations at N.J.A.C. 6A:8-4.

In June of this year the department alerted districts to changes in the administration of the Special Review Assessment. More recently, the department has presented additional updates describing how the new SRA process will operate in 2009-2010. That information is summarized on the department web site at http://www.nj.gov/education/assessment/hs/sra/082609update_files/frame.htm. Please note that the department will expect districts to release math and language arts teachers to score the student responses to the SRA performance tasks. Substitute stipends will be paid for teachers released for this purpose during the school week; there will be additional opportunities for teachers to score student AHSA responses on weekends, for which teachers may receive stipends directly, if district policy allows. Without such cooperation from districts and their staff, our capacity to ensure the continuation of this program is significantly diminished. The cooperation of district administrators and teachers is crucial to ensuring the continued availability of an alternate high school assessment program.

High school districts whose 2009 graduation data shows that 10 percent or more of graduating seniors satisfied their state testing requirement though the SRA must submit an analysis of this data, as required last year, and include the district's plans for reducing its SRA rate. This report must be submitted by November 16, 2009. An electronic template for compiling this report has been posted to the assessment section of the department web site at <http://www.nj.gov/education/assessment/hs/sra/>. Districts should use the "graduation type" information they submit to the School Report Card in September of each year to determine whether they have met the 10 percent SRA threshold.

The 2009-2010 statewide assessment schedule is posted on the Department of Education web site at <http://www.nj.gov/education/assessment/schedule.shtml>. Please review the schedule and ensure your district calendar reflects all necessary testing dates. If you have questions or comments about these matters, please contact Timothy Peters, director, Office of State Assessments, at (609) 984-7761 or by e-mail at timothy.peters@doe.state.nj.us.

WS/TP/memo:update on secondary assessment policy programs

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