



Christie Administration Announces Final Report of Study Commission on Student Assessments

For Immediate Release

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Trenton, NJ – The Study Commission on the Use of Student Assessments in New Jersey presented Governor Christie with its final report containing 49 recommendations, the Department of Education announced today. The nine-member Study Commission, created by Executive Order No. 159, was charged with reviewing and providing recommendations about the volume, frequency and impact of student assessments in New Jersey school districts.

The Study Commission examined New Jersey's academic standards, the use of the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness of College and Careers (PARCC) assessments, tests administered for college credit and college admission, and how the state's overall assessment system can most effectively improve education. The Study Commission sought to understand the underlying reasons for push back against the PARCC test flowing from frustrations with perceived overuse of standardized tests as well as the use of assessment data in the teacher evaluation process.

The Study Commission has presented a number of recommendations to directly address these concerns, including:

- **Continuation with PARCC:** The Commission stated that the statewide standardized test should meet certain criteria: It should be a tool to improve classroom instruction; accurately predict a student's readiness for college and career; be administered on computer; accommodate special needs of students; and be able to be used as the state's high-school graduation test. To that end, the commission's report recommended New Jersey "continue its membership and participation in the PARCC consortium and annually administer the PARCC instrument as its Statewide assessment."
- **High School Graduation Requirement:** State law requires students to pass a statewide assessment to graduate from high school. During the transition to PARCC, the Department has allowed students until the Class of 2019 to demonstrate high-school proficiency by achieving certain scores on a number of alternative assessments besides PARCC, such as the SAT, PSAT, ACT, Accuplacer, or military tests. The Study Commission recommended that, beginning with the graduating Class of 2020, students be required to take PARCC (although not achieve a certain score) before they can access the alternative assessments for graduation. Starting with the Class of 2021, the commission called on the Department to establish passing English Language Arts 10 and the Algebra I end-of-course PARCC assessments as the requirement for graduation for initial years of implementation, with the provision for reassessing the requirements in future years. (The state will continue to allow students who do not pass the assessment needed for high-school graduation to demonstrate proficiency through the portfolio appeals process.)
- **Over-testing:** The commission acknowledged concerns of over-testing in schools and its impact on instruction. The commission noted that the state's assessments in math, English and science are mandated by state or federal law, and other testing is done at the discretion of local school officials. The report recommended school districts conduct a thorough inventory of their own student assessments to determine the minimum amount of testing needed to improve student learning. It also called on the NJDOE to commission a study into the amount of testing in K-12 education and how tests are being used.
- **Test Preparation:** The commission acknowledged that many school districts spent considerable time preparing students for PARCC last year. While test preparation is expected to decrease as students and staff become more familiar with the test, the commission still called on the NJDOE to develop best practices that would help schools prepare students for the test in the most time-effective manner.

"The Study Commission was represented by many different educational stakeholders, including parents, teachers, principals, superintendents, school board members, higher education, and the business community," said Education Commissioner David C. Hespe, chairman of the commission. "Collectively, they devoted countless hours to proving insights and direction on this important issue."

The Study Commission reached unanimous consensus in its recommendations. It met 21 times from November 2014 to November 2015. In addition, it conducted focus groups with students regarding their experiences with the PARCC assessment, and it held three public testimony sessions in different parts of the state.

In addition to the major findings noted above, the Study Commission also:

- Recommended that the NJDOE further consider opportunities to reduce testing times, without compromising the integrity of the assessment program. A reduction in testing time was announced after the first PARCC implementation in 2014-15, when the consortium consolidated the two testing windows into one and substantially reduced the overall time of the assessment.
- Supported the new science standards that New Jersey recently adopted in July of 2014.
- Recommended that the NJDOE explore the feasibility and desirability of expanding resources, including tools to measure literacy in English Language Learners' native languages. The Department should also pursue with the federal government a two-year exemption for testing newly arrived English Language Learners.
- Recommended that the Department work to get greater flexibility from the federal government to address the concern that students with an Individual Education Plan be tested at the grade level they are in rather than at the level at which they are taught.
- Called on the NJDOE to partner with statewide education associations and advocacy groups to provide schools with professional learning resources; launch a communications campaign to identify best practices, address common misunderstandings, and provide a shared vision for the appropriate use of assessments; and train educators on how to analyze and use the assessment data to improve instruction.
- Proposed the NJDOE expand the use of waivers regarding educator evaluations. The NJDOE has already granted equivalencies to many school districts allowing them to customize their educator evaluation process to take into account their local contexts while still achieving the goal of providing thorough and effective evaluation and supervision of staff.
- Called on the NJDOE to encourage colleges and universities to use PARCC scores for identifying placement and enrollment in dual-credit programs. The commission also said teacher-preparation programs should better emphasize the effective use of student assessments measures and techniques. In addition, the commission said the Department should work with institutions of higher education to assess the PARCC test and assist in the development of future tests.
- Similarly, the NJDOE should meet with stakeholders in the business community to review PARCC content and gain a greater insight into how the assessment results can be useful to them in the context of hiring needs, employment policies and human resources guidelines.

The Study Commission's report will be shared with legislators, state policymakers and the public. Depending on the nature of the recommendation, changes would be reviewed and implemented by the appropriate body - whether it is the legislature, the Department of Education, stakeholder organizations, or local school officials.

The [full report](#) can be found online.