

**State Board of Education
Resolution
Comment/Response Form**

This comment and response form contains comments from the December 1, 2021, meeting of the State Board of Education (State Board) when the resolution was discussed.

Topic: Adoption of Cut Score Standards for the New Jersey Graduation Proficiency Assessments in English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics

Division: Teaching and Learning Services

Meeting Date: January 5, 2022

Completed by: Office of Assessments

Level: Adoption

Summary of Comments and Agency Responses

The following is a summary of the comments received from State Board of Education members and the Department of Education’s (Department) responses. Each commenter is identified at the end of the comment by a letter, which corresponds to the following list:

- A. Kathy Goldenberg, President, State Board of Education
- B. Andrew J. Mulvihill, Vice President, State Board of Education
- C. Arcelio Aponte, Member, State Board of Education
- D. Mary Beth Berry, Member, State Board of Education
- E. Dr. Ronald Butcher, Member, State Board of Education
- F. Jack Fornaro, Member, State Board of Education
- G. Dr. Nedd James Johnson, Member, State Board of Education
- H. Dr. Joseph Ricca, Jr., Member, State Board of Education

- 1. Comment:** The commenter asked for clarity around the key differences between the New Jersey Student Learning Assessments (NJSLA) and the New Jersey Student Graduation Proficiency Assessments (NJGPA), and how “college and career ready” and “graduation ready” differ. (C)

Response: The NJSLA focuses on a student’s trajectory as on a continuum as the student moves throughout their academic career. The terming of “college and career ready” is referring to the expected trajectory that students follow and the results of the NJSLA provide data points to determine if students are drifting from the expectation. The NJGPA however is a final snapshot of how well students retained specific macro skills and abilities that they will require to be successful post secondary education.

In consultation with the State Board, the macro skills and abilities required for graduation have been determined to be the standards for English language arts (ELA) grade 10, Algebra 1, and Geometry. Previously the NJSLA cut score for graduation on

these assessments was 750 to match the expected trajectory students would be following. This score was appropriate because the assessments were being provided at the end of the associated course the student was enrolled in. The proposed 725 cut score is designed to take into account the difference in the specificity of the items being utilized and the expected retention of material for one to six years post instruction.

2. **Comment:** The commenter stated that it is an arduous task to determine cut scores and it takes a lot of research and data to do so. The commenter complimented the Department on the effort to develop the proposed cut score. The commenter also stated that the State Board should rely on the experts, especially given the extensive discussions on the issue during meetings of the State Board’s Assessment Committee. **(E)**

Response: The Department thanks the commenter for the support.

3. **Comment:** The commenter asked if the Department is proposing to change the definition of what the graduation assessment is testing, and if “graduation ready” is a lower standard than “college and career ready.” **(B)**

Response: “Graduation ready” and “college and career ready” are different because of the timeframe they are expecting students to recall information from. The NJSLA focuses on a student’s trajectory as on a continuum as the student moves throughout their academic career. The terming of “college and career ready” is referring to the expected trajectory that students follow and the results of the NJSLA provide data points to determine if students are drifting from the expectation. The NJGPA however is a final snapshot of how well students retained specific macro skills and abilities that they will require to be successful post-secondary education.

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4. **Comment:** The commenter requested clarification about why the NJGPA seems to measure something different than the NJSLA in terms of core competencies. The commenter also asked how this differs also from the longstanding requirements in State statute. **(B)**

Response: The NJSLA focuses on a student’s trajectory as on a continuum as the student moves throughout their academic career. The terming of “college and career ready” is referring to the expected trajectory that students follow and the results of the NJSLA provide data points to determine if students are drifting from the expectation. The NJGPA however is a final snapshot of how well students retained specific macro skills and abilities that they will require to be successful post-secondary education.

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5. **Comment:** The commenter stated that the State Board wants all New Jersey students to graduate and to achieve college and career readiness. The commenter asked whether that is best determined through the NJSLA assessment or by complying with State statute to demonstrate that students are graduation ready and whether they have core competencies in the specified subject matters. (C)

Response: The NJSLA represents a continuum looking at students in grades three through nine for progress toward proficiency of the New Jersey Student Learning Standards (NJSLS) and meeting college and career readiness standards. Separately, the NJGPA, which will be administered in the 11th grade, is intended to meet the State statutory requirements to ensure that students have achieved core competencies before they graduate.

6. **Comment:** The commenter stated that there is a difference between evaluation and assessment and that the two concepts have been confused over the years. The commenter also stated that assessment is a snapshot on a continuum while evaluation applies judgement that carries consequences, which, in this case, is whether students are ready to graduate. The commenter expressed support that the differences are finally reflected in the purposes of the NJGPA (i.e., evaluation) and the NJSLA (i.e., assessment). (E)

Response: The Department thanks the commenter for the support.

7. **Comment:** The commenters expressed concern that the proposed cut scores by which students would be able to graduate may be set too low, and that some students who meet the cut scores will not be ready for a career or college without having to take remedial courses. (B, D)

Response: The graduation assessment is only one measure that students must meet to graduate from New Jersey's public high schools. Additional requirements related to courses, credits, and attendance must also be fulfilled before a student can graduate. The graduation requirements, in total, provide the confidence that students are ready to graduate and be successful.

8. **Comment:** The commenter asked if the NJSLA Algebra 1 assessment is considered harder or easier than the Algebra 1 portion of the NJGPA mathematics section. The commenter also asked if the expectation is that the percentage of students who are going to pass the NJGPA will be higher, lower, or the same as the NJSLA. (B)

Response: The Department is unable to provide a response, as difficulty is subjective and based on the individual test-taker's knowledge. The percentages of students who pass the assessment can be determined only once data is gathered after the assessment administration.

9. **Comment:** The commenter asked whether the Department would be proposing a different cut score if the NJGPA was designed to determine college and career readiness. (C)

Response: The NJGPA and the NJSLA are two different assessments that each have a different purpose. To meet the individual purpose of each assessment, the NJGPA and NJSLA must have different cut scores. The proposed cut score for the NJGPA is 725 and it meets the purpose of the assessment.

10. **Comment:** The commenter asked if any individuals from higher education individuals or if high school educators are members of the NJ TAC. (A)

Response: The NJ TAC consists of a national panel of assessment experts who are all professors and researchers from academic universities across the country. There are no high school educators on the NJ TAC. Educators serve on the various assessment development committees and support the Department with assessment development activities such as item reviews, passage reviews, and other parts of the assessment development cycle. The Statewide assessments are reviewed with New Jersey educators, whereas the NJ TAC supports the Department in ensuring the technical requirements for a valid and reliable assessment are met.

11. **Comment:** The commenter asked what the other State Board members would consider to be an acceptable cut score, and why some members view 725 as a low cut score. The commenter further stated that experts determined the cut scores are appropriate, and the commenter would not question the experts on the proposed cut score. (G)

Response: The Department thanks the commenter for the support.

12. **Comment:** The commenter asked why the NJGPA cut score should not be set as 750 instead of the proposed 725. The commenter also ask what would be the impact if the cut score is set at the higher level. (B)

Response: The Department followed industry-standard processes with the assessment vendors and the NJ TAC. After considering the performance level descriptors and the requirements for the design of the assessment, the recommended cut score was set at 725. Impact data will be available after the NJGPA's first administration and will be reviewed by the Department. The Department will analyze the data to ensure that the recommended cut score of 725 remains appropriate. It is not possible to determine the impacts of a higher cut score without assessment data.

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13. **Comment:** The commenter asked if the Department plans to bring impact data to the State Board within the first year to review. **(A)**

Response: The Department intends to continue updating the State Board on the assessment administration and ongoing development efforts.

14. **Comment:** The commenter stated that the goal for assessment or evaluation is for students to showcase their ability to be successful, not what percentages of students will pass or fail. The commenter also stated that, when discussing this kind of assessment, the State Board rely on the psychometricians and experts that determine fair and equitable cut scores. **(H)**

Response: The Department thanks the commenter for the support.

15. **Comment:** The commenter asked how often the Department meets with the NJ TAC. **(D)**

Response: The Department generally meets with the NJ TAC several times throughout the year in two-day meetings, plus other opportunities for the Department and the NJ TAC to connect virtually.

16. **Comment:** The commenter asked if the discussions currently taking place among the State Board are mirrored by discussions with the NJ TAC. The commenter also asked if NJ TAC members viewed the proposed cut score as being set too low. **(D)**

Response: The process for determining appropriate cut scores is complex, and assessment development experts from the NJDOE, our vendors and the NJ TAC supported the development and recommendation of the proposed cut scores for the NJGPA. After reviewing data and the totality of circumstances related to student performance, the NJ TAC determined that the proposed cut score of 725 was appropriate as a baseline for the assessment's first administration.

17. **Comment:** The commenter asked if the Department is seeking to establish a cut score based on loss of instruction due to the COVID-19 pandemic. **(A)**

Response: A multitude of factors were considered when evaluating the proposed cut score, such as the time that students would be away from when instruction has taken place, as compared to an end-of-course assessment. Additionally, currently available student performance statistics from existing NJSLA assessment items and performance level descriptors for the assessment were leveraged to inform the recommended cut score.

18. **Comment:** The commenter asked how, if after approving a cut score, the State Board can review and determine if a change in the cut score is necessary, and how the State Board is brought into that process. **(B)**

Response: Following each assessment administration cycle, the Office of Assessments and its assessment vendors conduct an annual review of each state assessment to document the technical fidelity of the assessment. The cut score is in effect until it is changed by the State Board via a resolution.

19. **Comment:** The commenter asked if a cut score is approved, and the State Board believes it is too low, how long it goes into effect until a revision can be made by the State Board. **(B)**

Response: Following each assessment administration cycle, the Office of Assessments and its assessment vendors conduct an annual review of each state assessment to document the technical fidelity of the assessment. The cut score is in effect until it is changed by the State Board via a resolution.

20. **Comment:** The commenter stated that the proposed cut score lowers the standard for students, which allows for teachers to not perform at the highest level at which they should be performing. The commenter also stated that the effect of the proposed NJGPA cut score on teacher evaluations should be considered. **(F)**

Response: In consultation with the State Board, the NJGPA has been designed with the level of rigor that aligns to the standards of ELA in grade 10, Algebra 1, and Geometry. The performance level descriptors and the existing distribution of student performance are all factors that were considered when the assessment vendors and internal teams looked at the initial recommendation for the cut score of 725 for both ELA and mathematics. The proposed cut score was also discussed with the NJ TAC, which ultimately determined that 725 was the most appropriate baseline for this assessment administration.

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Since the NJGPA is being administered year(s) following instruction it is not appropriate to tie this performance back to individual teachers when they were no longer instructing the student.



**Adoption Resolution
January 5, 2022**

State of New Jersey
STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

A Resolution Establishing Proficient Level Cut Score Standards for The New Jersey Graduation Proficiency Assessment (NJGPA): Mathematics And English Language Arts

Whereas, according to N.J.S.A. 18A:7C-1, the Commissioner of Education with the approval of the State Board of Education shall establish a program of standards for graduation from secondary school, and such a program shall include, but not be limited to the development of a Statewide test in reading, writing and computational skills to be administered to all secondary school pupils as provided herein, and clear and explicit Statewide levels of proficiency in reading, writing and computational skills to be demonstrated as a minimum requirement for high school graduation; and

Whereas, according to N.J.S.A. 18A:7C-6, the State graduation proficiency test shall be administered to all 11th grade pupils and to any 11th or 12th grade pupil who has previously failed to demonstrate mastery of State graduation proficiency standards on said test; and

Whereas, the establishment of cut scores was completed for the State graduation proficiency test, called the New Jersey Graduation Proficiency Assessment (NJGPA), in accordance with industry best practices in large-scale assessment to determine the assessments' validity and the theoretically appropriate performance level cut scores; and

Whereas, the State Board approves the Department's selection of the respective NJGPA proficient level cut scores; and

Whereas, the Department will monitor the impact of these tests and proficient level cut scores on the proficiency rates and will report any problems with the same to the State Board; now therefore be it

Resolved, that the State Board of Education hereby approves the following proficient level cut scores, effective January 5, 2022:

NJGPA Graduation Ready Cut Scores

ELA	Mathematics
725	725

Angelica Allen-McMillan, Ed.D., Acting Commissioner
Acting Secretary, N.J. State Board of Education

Kathy Goldenberg, President
N.J. State Board of Education