

# Family and Community Circle



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NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION NEWSLETTER

## More about New Jersey's New Evaluation and Support System: AchieveNJ

In schools, teachers and leaders have the greatest influence on student learning. Since 2010, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) has been working to improve educator evaluation and supports. These efforts have included a two-year pilot that has involved more than 15,000 teachers and principals. Building on this work, 2013–14 will be the first school year of full statewide implementation of the new system, [AchieveNJ](#).

Current evaluations are often subjective, and do not result in better teaching and learning practices. Our students and educators deserve more. Teaching our students and leading our schools is essential and challenging work and our educators should have an evaluation system that recognizes and rewards them as professionals. Over the past two years we have worked collaboratively with teachers and principals from across the state to develop the new [AchieveNJ](#) evaluation system, which will honor their achievements and ensure that

they have the tools they need as they continuously develop their craft and help all of our students succeed.

The [AchieveNJ](#) website [www.nj.gov/education/AchieveNJ](http://www.nj.gov/education/AchieveNJ) provides several resources about the new evaluation system, including a presentation, overviews for teachers and principals, and frequently asked questions. We are sharing this information with parents and community members to be as transparent as possible as we begin rolling out this process. The NJDOE is also working on a plan to make this information more parent-friendly. Please look for additional information in future editions of the Family and Community Circle Newsletter. We are continuing to add new resources and appreciate your questions and feedback. Please contact the Office of Evaluation directly at [educatorevaluation@doe.state.nj.us](mailto:educatorevaluation@doe.state.nj.us).

### RESOURCES

- [AchieveNJ](#) website: <http://www.nj.gov/education/AchieveNJ/>
- [AchieveNJ](#) resources: <http://www.nj.gov/education/AchieveNJ/resources/OutreachMaterials.pdf>
- [AchieveNJ](#) Overview PPT: <http://www.nj.gov/education/AchieveNJ/intro/overview.pdf>
- [AchieveNJ](#) Guide: <http://www.nj.gov/education/AchieveNJ/intro/guide.pdf>
- [AchieveNJ](#) for Teachers: <http://www.nj.gov/education/AchieveNJ/intro/1PagerTeachers.pdf>
- [AchieveNJ](#) for Principals: <http://www.nj.gov/education/AchieveNJ/intro/1PagerPrincipals.pdf>
- FAQs: [http://www.nj.gov/education/genfo/faq/faq\\_eval.shtml](http://www.nj.gov/education/genfo/faq/faq_eval.shtml)

## PARCC: A Change in New Jersey State Testing

In 2011, New Jersey became a member of the Governing Board of the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) to help to develop new assessments that would address some of the challenges that New Jersey faces in education such as the dissatisfaction with current testing methods that do not fully measure state standards. An important part of problem solving is the development of critical thinking skills. Critical thinking skills are necessary for success in every subject. As such, New Jersey is working to establish tests that will accurately measure those skills.

Families are often frustrated by the testing process. For example, there is often disappointment regarding the slow return of test scores, the fact that the state does not release specific test items, and the sometimes difficult to understand scoring information. New Jersey is working to relieve parent frustrations; not only in these areas, but in others as well. While the number of testing sessions under PARCC will be higher than NJ ASK, the average duration of individual testing sessions will be shorter, lasting about an hour each rather than a whole morning of testing.

Presently, there is a partnership of 22 states that have been working over the past several years to launch new assessments in English language arts and math, aligned to the Common Core. Families can expect the rollout of these tests to begin in the 2014-15 school year. Students who were freshmen this year (2012 – 13) will be the first cohort to be administered the new PARCC assessments when they become juniors in high school (2014 – 15). The new tests will eventually replace our current statewide assessments – NJ ASK and HSPA.

For more information about PARCC, please visit the following webpage: <http://www.parcconline.org/samples/item-task-prototypes>

## FAMILY and COMMUNITY CIRCLE



*By Dr. Felecia Nace, Office of Strategic Communications & Partnerships,  
in Conjunction with the New Jersey Department of Education's Special Education Office*

# The ABC's of Special Education: Parent's Rights and Responsibilities

**What does a referral to a Child Study Team mean for your child?** When it is believed that a child may be in need of special education services, a referral is made to the child study team. You will be invited to a meeting with the child study team and a teacher to decide if an evaluation should be conducted to determine your child's eligibility for special education and related services. To understand more about the beginning of the referral process, see pages 1-3 of the New Jersey Department of Education's (NJDOE's) Parental Rights in Special Education (PRISE) booklet. Be sure to visit page 28 for definitions of special education terms.

**What if your child has been referred to a child study team, and you disagree with the referral?** At the meeting to decide if an evaluation should be conducted, you should discuss your concerns with the child study team members and the teacher. You should listen to the information they provide regarding your child's progress and why the referral was made. Before you go to the meeting, prepare a list of questions you have about the evaluation process, the programs and services that can be provided for your child and how often your child's progress will be reviewed to determine if he or she continues to need special education. If, after considering all the evidence, you disagree with the recommendation for evaluation by the child study team, you can refuse consent as indicated on pages 4-6 of the NJDOE's PRISE booklet.

If at the meeting, the child study team, the teacher, and you decide that an evaluation is a good idea, you will be asked to give written consent. Once you have given consent for an evaluation, your child will be tested and some of his/her records may be reviewed to determine if he/she has a disability and is eligible for special education and related services. Please see page 7 of the PRISE booklet. Under certain circumstances, you may request that a qualified person outside of the school district evaluate your child. This is called an independent evaluation. Details about independent evaluations begin on page 8 of the PRISE booklet.

**What happens after the initial evaluation?** After your child has been evaluated, you will be invited to another meeting with one or more of the child study team members, a general and a special education teacher. The evaluation results will be discussed and the group will determine if your child is eligible for special education services. If your child is determined to be eligible, at that meeting, or at a later

meeting, a member of the child study team, a general and special education teacher and you will develop an Individualized Education Program (IEP). The IEP will be created specifically for your child to target your child's specific needs. Details about the IEP can be found on pages 10-11. Here, you can also find information about how often your child will be evaluated while in a special education program. See the section on re-evaluation beginning on page 11.

**What are your rights with respect to your child's records?** As a parent of a student with special needs, you will need to understand your rights regarding access to your child's records. Your child's records are required to be kept confidential by the school. Information regarding exactly who has the right to access your child's records and the procedure for accessing the records can be found on pages 12-13 of the PRISE booklet.

**What does the term "surrogate parent" mean and when is one needed?** For answers to these questions, see page 13 and the top of page 14 in the PRISE booklet.



**What if you disagree with all or part of the evaluation of your child or you disagree with various parts of the IEP? What are your rights? What is the best way to show that you disagree?**

There are processes in place when families disagree with the evaluation results, evaluation process, and the IEP. The procedures you must follow are very clear and are outlined in the PRISE booklet. The booklet walks you through the process and provides forms for you to use to communicate your concerns.

Information about procedures regarding disagreements that may arise about special education issues may be located on pages 15 through 40. Disciplinary procedures are covered in these pages as well.

If you need assistance understanding your rights and responsibilities, resource information can be found at the top of page 41. Additionally, if your family needs information on how to transition your child from special education services into adult life, please visit pages 41-43 of the PRISE booklet. If your child is referred to the child study team, it is important to keep the PRISE booklet in a location where you can refer to it when needed or write down the web link. The PRISE booklet is available online in several languages at this link:

<http://www.nj.gov/education/specialed/info/>

Families can find additional information on the New Jersey Department of Education's website here:

<http://www.state.nj.us/education/specialed/pands.shtml>

## FAMILY and COMMUNITY CIRCLE

# New School Performance Reports

Just like children receive report cards, so do schools. This year we replaced the outdated School Report Cards with new, more meaningful School Performance Reports. School Performance Reports provide schools and you, the public, with information regarding the progress of schools each year. The new reports were developed with the contribution of representatives from New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association (NJPSA), New Jersey Association of School Administrators (NJASA), New Jersey School Boards Association (NJSBA) and the New Jersey Parent-Teacher Association (NJPTA). The new School Performance Reports provide a substantial amount of new data in order to present a more complete picture of how New Jersey schools are doing throughout the school year. This will ultimately help schools and school supporters engage in local goal setting and improvement.

For example, the School Performance Reports for the first time include metrics, or standards of measurement, at all grade levels to identify how well students are demonstrating skills and behaviors that measure what we care about most – whether students are preparing to be college and career ready. In addition, for the first time, the reports also include a “peer school comparison” for each school in the state. This replaces the District Factor Group (DFG) used in the previous school report cards and compares schools with similar grade structures that are educating students with similar demographic characteristics, such as free/reduced lunch eligibility, low English speaking ability or special education program participation. The “peer school comparison” will help to identify the strengths and areas of improvement for schools similar to one another. We hope that this annual publication of school performance will give educators and family member alike the opportunity to have meaningful conversations around goal setting at the school and district level for the coming year.

Beyond the “peer school comparison” and measurements of college and career readiness, the performance reports will include: percentage of students constantly absent, students taking at least one Advanced Placement (AP) test, and the percentage of students taking the SAT and PSAT. Measures of student growth will also be covered using the Student Growth Percentile (SGP) method. SGP measures how students in grades 4 through 8 progress on the NJASK language arts literacy and math assessments when compared to other students with the same test score history.

Previously, the reports focused on skill and ability alone. This did not provide a clear picture of school performance because schools all begin at different starting points. By combining skill and ability data along with growth information, the new reports can help both educators and communities identify the areas in which students are demonstrating high growth but low skill and ability, or high skill and ability but low growth.

To view your school’s performance report or for additional information, view the following webpage:

<http://education.state.nj.us/pr/>



## Understanding Graduation Rates

One of the most important roles of the State Department of Education is to provide accurate and helpful information to parents about student and school performance. Over the last several years, the Department of Education has been working to create a more accurate and complete count of the true graduation rate across the state.

In previous years, New Jersey, like most states across the country, calculated high school graduation rates in a way that led to significant error. Rates were self-reported by districts, and were calculated by counting how many students graduated in 12th grade out of the number of students that started the year in 12th grade, and then adding in the number of dropouts in each of the previous years. This method contained flaws that resulted in exaggerated rates due to some districts’ under-reporting of dropout totals. Using this former system, the graduation rate of 2010 was 94.7%

In 2011, New Jersey adopted the new method for counting graduation rates that was required of all states by the federal government. Under this methodology, districts must track each student from the moment they enter 9th grade through our statewide data system – NJSMART. As students move to another district or state, leave the country, or pass away after 9th grade, districts are required to identify those changes and enter them into NJSMART. By doing so, we are able to calculate the number of graduates in 12th grade out of the number of students who started in 9th grade, with the exception of those students who move or have another justifiable reason for not being included in the graduation rate.

This new graduation rate is comparable across all states, and the good news is that New Jersey’s graduation rate is high compared to the rest of the country. In 2012, our statewide graduation rate was 86%, up three points from the graduation rate in 2011 of 83%. Each school’s individual graduation rate can be found in our School Performance Reports found on our website and discussed in another article in this newsletter.

For more information on this method, visit:

<http://nj.gov/governor/news/news/552012/approved/20120430a.html>

For a summary of test results, including individual school and district, visit:

<http://www.nj.gov/education/schools/achievement/2013/>

And for graduation rates visit:

<http://www.nj.gov/education/data/grate/2012/>

## The New Jersey Chamber of Commerce Announces Free Educational Activities for Students this Summer

The LearnDoEarn Business Simulation Boot Camp & Workshop is an engaging educational experience for high school students that combine a series of instructional and motivational workshops with the excitement of competition. Students will gain a more complete understanding of the business world, and their potential role in it, through interactive presentations, exercises, and games. Students will assume the role of employers in launching a business that will design, manufacture, market, and sell a product; and they will make hiring and budgeting decisions. Participants will work in teams; their work product and performance will be judged by a panel of business people. Through these and other activities, students will discover, define, and commit to acquiring the academic knowledge, skills, and behaviors necessary to achieve success in the demanding and competitive worlds of college and work.

Thanks to a grant from the NJ Department of Labor and Workforce Development, the New Jersey Chamber of Commerce Foundation will be conducting FREE four-day workshops this July in the following counties: Bergen, Burlington, Cumberland, and Passaic.

The LearnDoEarn Business Simulation Boot Camp & Workshop is open to college bound high school students in grades 8 through 11. The age group varies depending on the workshop, noted below.

- **Cumberland County, July 8 – 11 9:00 am – 3:00 pm**  
For students entering 9th or 10th grades in fall, 2013  
Cumberland County College, Luciano Conference Center,  
3322 College Dr., Vineland, NJ 08360
- **Burlington County, July 15 – 18 9:00 am – 3:00 pm**  
For students entering 9th or 10th grades in fall, 2013  
Burlington County Human Services Building,  
795 Woodlane Road, Westampton, NJ 08060
- **Bergen County, July 15 – 18 9:00 am – 3:00 pm**  
For students entering 11th or 12th grades in fall, 2013  
Bergen Community College, Ciarco Learning Center,  
355 Main Street, Hackensack, NJ 07601
- **Bergen County, July 22 – 25 9:00 am – 3:00 pm**  
For students entering 9th or 10th grades in fall, 2013  
Bergen Community College, Ciarco Learning Center,  
355 Main Street, Hackensack, NJ 07601
- **Passaic County, July 22 – 25 9:00 am – 3:00 pm**  
For students entering 9th or 10th grades in fall, 2013  
Passaic County Community College, Paterson Room,  
204 Ellison St., Paterson, NJ 07505

For more information and to access student registration forms, go to [www.LearnDoEarn.org](http://www.LearnDoEarn.org) and click on the Events tab.

Compiled by Cynthia Bucchi,  
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The Office of Strategic Communications and Partnerships is responsible for responding to questions from family and community members who write to "Ask DOE" through our website and choose the topic "other." Our Office routes questions to the appropriate program offices in order to provide families and community members the best possible customer service. We have compiled some of the recent frequently asked questions received from across the state. If you are interested in writing to "Ask DOE" please visit our webpage at the following address:

<http://www.state.nj.us/education/parents/>

**Question: Is summer school offered in my school district?**

**Answer:** Summer school comes under the purview of your local school board. Regulations for summer school sessions can be accessed by following this link (N.J.A.C. 6A:32-10.1 to 10.5):

<http://www.state.nj.us/education/code/current/title6a/chap32.pdf>.

Please contact your local school district to inquire about summer school. For contact information, you may wish to use our NJ School Directory at <http://education.state.nj.us/directory/>

**Question: Can my child's school district give out summer assignments?**

**Answer:** Policies on summer assignments come under the purview of individual boards of education. Local school board authority can include summer assignments.

If you have not done so already, we encourage you to seek from the school or district a parent/student handbook where pertinent policies are usually identified and defined. If the handbook does not answer your questions, contacting the principal, superintendent or the board of education could provide the answers to policies on summer assignments.

**Have a great summer!**