

Students with Disabilities and the New Jersey Statewide Assessment System

Information for Families



June 2003

What is the statewide assessment system?

The statewide assessment system is a series of tests developed to determine how your child is progressing toward achieving the Core Curriculum Content Standards (CCCS). New Jersey's statewide assessment system has been aligned with the mandates of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 which requires that states have assessment systems to measure how **all** students in the state are learning content standards. For the first time, schools and districts will be monitored on the performance of **all** students, including those with disabilities. Currently, New Jersey

The CCCS, adopted by the New Jersey State Board of Education, identify what New Jersey students should know and be able to do by specified grades. The standards also include the Core Curriculum Content Standards for Students with Severe Disabilities (CCCSSSD), which include many of the standards from the Core Curriculum Content Standards. However, the progress indicators have been modified to focus on the needs of students who are learning daily living skills. The New Jersey statewide assessment system includes the following components:

The New Jersey Assessment of Knowledge and Skills – Grade 3 (NJ ASK-3) will measure what third graders need to know and be able to do.

The New Jersey Assessment of Knowledge and Skills – Grade 4 (NJ ASK-4) measures what fourth graders know and are able to do.

The Grade Eight Proficiency Assessment (GEPA) measures the knowledge and skills of eighth graders. The GEPA also helps to determine whether a child is making satisfactory progress toward mastering the skills he/she will need to pass the High School Proficiency Assessment.

The High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA) measures what eleventh graders know and are able to do. Students who will be in the eleventh grade for the first time in the 2002-2003 school year will take the new High School Proficiency Assessment (**HSPA**), which replaces the Grade 11 High School Proficiency Test (HSPT11). The **HSPA** was developed to measure progress in the Core Curriculum Content Standards, while the HSPT11 is an older test based on a set of knowledge and skills developed prior to the adoption of the Core Curriculum Content Standards.

The Special Review Assessment (SRA) has been an alternative assessment to the HSPT11 for seniors in both general and special education who have had difficulty passing the HSPT11. A new SRA has been developed for the **HSPA**.

The Alternate Proficiency Assessment (APA) is designed to measure the progress of students with severe disabilities who cannot participate in the assessments listed above.

What is the purpose of the statewide assessment system?

The statewide assessment system is designed to inform the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) and the public about how well schools and school districts are doing in teaching the Core Curriculum Content Standards to New Jersey students. The tests also inform school districts and parents about each student's levels of proficiency in the subject areas tested, as well as areas where he or she may need more instruction. Results can help schools improve their programs to better educate your child.

The state tests are different from other assessments that are given to determine whether your child is eligible for special education or the nature of his or her individual learning needs. Statewide assessment is only one method of measuring your child's progress. When making educational decisions, test scores should be considered along with other assessment information obtained from teachers and child study teams, as well as your own observations.

Must all students with disabilities participate in the statewide assessment system?

Yes. Students with disabilities must participate in the general statewide assessments (NJ ASK, GEPA, and HSPA/HSPT11/SRA) **or** the Alternate Proficiency Assessment.

In New Jersey, students with disabilities must participate in each subject area assessment of the NJ ASK, GEPA and HSPT11/HSPA unless the student's IEP team determines that the student:

- **has not been instructed in any of the knowledge and skills tested; and**
- **would not be able to do the types of items on the assessment.**

What is my role as a parent in making decisions about statewide assessment?

You as a parent, and as a member of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team, are involved in making decisions about how your child will participate in statewide assessments at the IEP meeting. The IEP team must decide:

- ◆ What accommodations and/or modifications will be necessary for your child to participate in the assessment given in his or her grade; and
- ◆ Whether the students will take the general assessment (NJ ASK-3, NJ ASK-4, GEPA or HSPA) or the APA in each content area assessed.

In addition, as a parent, you and the other members of the IEP team must ensure that IEP goals and objectives are related to the Core Curriculum Content Standards and/or the Core Curriculum Content Standards for Students with Severe Disabilities (CCSSSD), as well as other educational needs.

What is the Alternate Proficiency Assessment?

The APA is a portfolio assessment designed to measure progress toward achieving the CCCS and/or the CCCSSSD for those students with disabilities who are unable to participate in the NJ ASK, GEPA or the HSPA. The APA is given to students with disabilities in grades 3, 4, 8, and 11 (or if ungraded, ages 9, 10, 14, and 18) whose IEPs indicate that they will take a statewide alternate assessment. The APA is a collection of student work demonstrating what each student can do in relation to the standards and the student's IEP.

What are “accommodations and modifications?”

“Accommodations” and “modifications” are changes in how a test is presented to a student, or how a student responds on tests, needed in order for a student with a disability to participate in the test. Some *examples* of accommodations and modifications that are approved by the NJDOE include:

Setting

- ◆ administering the assessment in a small group;
- ◆ seating the student in the front of the room near the teacher;

Scheduling

- ◆ providing extra time for the student to take the test;
- ◆ providing frequent breaks during the assessment;

Test Materials

- ◆ administering a large-print or Braille version of the assessment;

Test Procedures

- ◆ dictating oral responses to a scribe (a person who writes down what the student says).

Students receiving special education and related services and students who have Section 504 plans are eligible to have accommodations and/or modifications during statewide assessments. The IEP or Section 504 team determines what accommodations and modifications the student will have during a statewide assessment based on the approved list developed by the NJDOE. Accommodations or modifications selected by the IEP team for statewide assessment should be consistent with those the child needs in the classroom.

How can I learn more about statewide assessments?

The following documents describe the statewide assessment system in more depth. The documents listed below, as well as others, are available through the NJDOE Office of Distribution Services at (609) 984-0905 and on the Department of Education web site at <http://www.state.nj.us/education>.

Core Curriculum Content Standards and the Core Curriculum Content Standards for Students with Severe Disabilities: These describe what all New Jersey students should be learning.

Family and Student Pamphlets: Prior to the administration of each statewide assessment, guides for families and students are disseminated through your child's school. Family pamphlets are also on the web site.

Assessment Accommodations and Modifications: The NJDOE approved list has been distributed to each school district. The list is also available on the web site on the special education page.

APA Manuals: Educators' manuals describe procedures for administering the APA.

Statewide Assessment and Students with Disabilities: Frequently Asked Questions: This document answers questions often asked by parents and educators about students with disabilities and statewide assessments.

Sample Test Forms: These are full samples of the ESPA, GEPA, and the HSPA along with information about how the tests are scored. Sample responses to open-ended questions are also included. Although a sample form of the NJ ASK is not available, the ESPA sample form presents test items similar to those that will appear on the NJ ASK.

Please check the department's web site frequently for new documents regarding special education, curriculum, and assessment.

Additional Hints:

- talk with your case manager prior to the IEP meeting about statewide assessment decisions;
- talk with your child's teachers to find out how they are preparing students for the assessment;
- talk with your child before statewide assessment to show support; and
- congratulate your child for his or her efforts after the test is over.

For more information, contact the Office of Special Education Programs at (609) 292-3065 or the Office of Evaluation and Assessment at the following numbers:

- NJ ASK (609) 292-8779
- GEPA (609) 777-3672
- HSPT11 (609) 292-3226
- HSPA (609) 292-8739
- APA (609) 984-0107

You may contact the State Parents Advocacy Network (SPAN) at (973) 642-8100.

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