

Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) Assessment and Accountability in the Fifty States: 1999-2000

NEW JERSEY

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State Assessment System (1999-2000 school year)

1. *Provide a brief overview and history of the assessment system as the context.*

Districts in the state are required to administer the statewide assessments:

- the Elementary School Proficiency Assessment (ESPA),
- the Grade Eight Proficiency Assessment (GEPA), and
- the High School Proficiency Test (HSPT)/ High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA) (*HSPA: see changes below*).

2. *What are the characteristics of the state assessment system, including:*

- *Name of Assessment Instrument(s) or Program(s)*
 - Elementary School Proficiency Assessment (ESPA)
 - Grade Eight Proficiency Assessment (GEPA)
 - High School Proficiency Test (HSPT)/ High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA)
- *Grade Levels and Subjects Tested*

Elementary School Proficiency Assessment (ESPA): given to 4th and 5th grade students and covers language arts literacy (reading and writing), mathematics and science.

Grade Eight Proficiency Assessment (GEPA): given to eighth grade students and covers language arts literacy, mathematics and science. This replaced the Early Warning Test (EWT) for eighth grade students.

High School Proficiency Test (HSPT): given to eleventh and twelfth grade students and covers reading, math and writing.

- *Norm or Criterion Referenced:* Criterion
- *Matrix or Census Testing:* Census
- *Item Types (including proportions if available via Internet or interview) such as: traditional or enhanced multiple choice, performance tasks, open-ended questions, portfolios, essays, etc.*

Students are asked to solve problems, think critically and write about what they are thinking. The state assessments contain both multiple choice and open-ended questions such as essays.

- *Time of Testing (specific month(s) or testing window)*
ESPA: May
GEPA: March
HSPT: October and April (HSPA: March and October (*see changes below*))

- *High School Exit Exam (date of implementation and/or phase-in timeline)*

High School Proficiency Test (HSPT):

- first given to eleventh grade students; twelfth grade students retest until they pass
- covers reading, math and writing
- students are required to pass it (score 300) in order to graduate
- will be replaced by the HSPA in 2001-02.

- *Other Assessments (see inclusion section for further details on these assessments)*

Special Review Assessment: alternate assessment for twelfth-grade students who have met all of the graduation requirements except for passing all sections of the HSPT

Alternate Proficiency Assessment: administered to students with severe disabilities who cannot participate in other assessments due to the severity of their disabilities (implementation date is tentatively the 2001-02 school year).

- *Transitional or Final Assessment System*

The current system is final, although the state is still adding to the system already in place by adding new subjects and changing the high school assessment (see changes below).

3. Who designed and produced the assessment(s) used by the state?

The state's Test Development Committee designed the test specifications to reflect the state standards. The committee consists of the state's teachers, as well as school and district administrators. Once this process was complete, the production of the test questions and distribution of the assessments were contracted out to National Computer Systems (NCS).

4. *What are the state requirements for local assessment, including the types of assessments and their use in areas such as reporting and accountability, as well as Title I adequate yearly progress? What grade levels and subjects are tested?*

The Statewide assessment system provided by the Department of Education will be the assessment of record in New Jersey.

5. *Is the state assessment system aligned with the state standards? Are there plans for alignment, and if so, how will the assessment and standards become aligned?*

New Jersey assessments are criterion-referenced. Each content area within the statewide assessment went through a “standard setting session” whereby a panel of judges evaluated psychometric data to ensure reliability and validity. This means that students are appropriately assessed against fixed criteria and that test administration procedures are standardized statewide.

6. *What is the state’s approach for ensuring alignment and what evidence of that alignment is provided?*

As stated, the state’s Test Development Committee designed the test specifications to reflect the state standards. The state Technical Advisory Committee reviews and approves the standard setting process that is applied to each content area and then a separate panel of judges drawn from a pool of New Jersey educators judges the validity and reliability of each test question by subject area.

7. *How is the data included in the state assessment system used?*

The Statewide assessment system serves multiple purposes. For parents of students taking the Elementary School Proficiency Assessment (ESPA) and the Grade Eight Proficiency Assessment (GEPA), it provides information regarding the adequacy of their developing basic skills, higher order reasoning ability, and content knowledge. For students taking the High School Proficiency Test (HSPT), it provides information about content knowledge and serves as a graduation requirement. The earlier statewide assessments, along with other measures of student achievement, help to predict eventual performance on the HSPT.

For districts and schools, the statewide assessment system gauges the alignment of their curriculum and instructional strategies with the Core Curriculum Content Standards and cumulative progress indicators. For the State Board of Education, the assessment system provides student achievement information to guide or support Statewide policy decisions. For the Department of Education, the assessment system provides a foundation for certifying that local school districts and charter schools have aligned their programs to the Core Curriculum Content Standards and are providing a thorough and efficient education for all students. For parents and taxpayers, publishing several years of assessment results in the annual School Report Card provides a view of how each school is performing over time.

8. *Are there changes planned for the state assessment system (proposed or enacted and to be implemented)? If so, what do these plans include? Why are these changes being made and what is the timeline? Are there implications for the state reporting or accountability systems (Title I or in general)?*

Over the next six years, the Department of Education plans to include all seven content areas as specified in Core Curriculum Content Standards in the statewide assessments.

Elementary School Proficiency Assessment (ESPA):

In the future, four more subjects will be added:

1. Social studies (2000-01)
2. Visual and performing arts (2001-02)
3. Health and Physical Education (2002-03)
4. World Languages (2003-04)

Grade Eight Proficiency Assessment (GEPA):

In the future, five more subjects will be added:

1. Science (1999-2000: field tested in 1999)
2. Social studies (2001-02)
3. Visual and performing arts (2003-04)
4. Health and Physical Education (2003-04)
5. World Languages (2003-04)

High School Proficiency Test (HSPT): This will be replaced by the **High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA)** in 2001-2002.

9. *What have been the major issues and challenges in the area of state assessment? Explain.*

The extended length of the ESPA in particular has been an issue in the state. Complaints from parents and teachers about the length of the test persuaded the NJDOE to shorten the length of the ESPA from the original version.

Inclusion Policies for Assessment

1. *What exclusions are made in the current state assessment for students with disabilities? LEP? Who makes the decision about exclusion of a particular child? Does the state collect data or in other ways monitor the number and types of students excluded? Does that vary by test?*

All students at grade levels four, eight, and 11-12 will take all appropriate Statewide assessments as scheduled. Students with disabilities participate in the appropriate statewide assessment unless the student's disability is so severe that the student is not receiving instruction in any of the knowledge and skills measured by the statewide assessment in a subject area with or without accommodations.

2. *What accommodations and/or modifications are made on the current state assessment for students with disabilities? LEP?*

Students with disabilities who cannot participate in the assessments due to the severity of their disability and who meet the established criteria are afforded the opportunity to take assessments in an alternative format. Students with disabilities may also be provided accommodations for taking regular assessments. These testing decisions are made by the Child Study Team. Information about test content and item types from the test specifications booklets may be used to make this decision. If the Child Study Team determines that the student will not participate in a particular statewide or districtwide assessment of student achievement, or part of such an assessment, the IEP must contain a statement of why that assessment is not appropriate for the student and a statement of how that student will be assessed.

Testing accommodations for special education students who are able to take state assessments with accommodations are provided, as appropriate, as follows:

Seating Accommodation

1. Administering the assessment
 - individually in a separate room
 - in a small group in a separate room
 - in the resource room
 - in a special education class
 - using carrels
 - at home or in a hospital (this will depend on the nature of the assessment task)
2. Seating the student in the front of the room near the examiner or proctor
3. Seating the student facing the examiner or proctor
4. Providing special lighting
5. Providing special furniture (e.g., desks, trays, carrels)

Scheduling Accommodations

1. Adding time as needed
2. Providing frequent breaks
3. Terminating a section of the test when a student has indicated that he/she has completed all the items he/she can. (The test administrator must ensure that the student has attempted all items in a section since items are not ordered by difficulty. When this accommodation is used, the test must be administered in a small group or individually to avoid distraction.)

Test Materials Modifications

1. Administering the large-print version of test materials
2. Administering the Braille version of test materials. (Braille versions are currently available for the ESPA and the HSPT. Braille versions will be available for the HSPA as of October 2000 and the GEPA at a future date.)

Test Procedures Modifications

1. Administration modifications
 - reading directions aloud

- reading test questions aloud
 - providing amplification (hearing aid and/or FM system)
 - using a sign language or cued speech interpreter for administration of directions or questions but not reading passages
 - masking a portion of the test booklet and/or answer folder to eliminate visual distractors or providing reading windows
 - repeating, clarifying, or rewording directions
 - providing written directions on a separate sheet or transparency
 - using an examiner who is familiar with the student
 - using an examiner who can communicate fluently in sign language
 - providing manipulatives for math items
 - using graph paper for math section
 - using a Braille ruler and talking calculator
 - using tactile or visual cues for deaf or hard-of-hearing students to indicate time to begin, time remaining, and time to end a particular part of the test
2. Response modifications
- having an examiner record the student's identifying information on the test booklet or answer folder
 - dictating oral responses to a scribe (student must indicate all punctuation and must spell all key words)
 - using a Braille writer to record responses
 - signing responses to sign language interpreter (student must indicate all punctuation and must spell all key words)
 - recording responses on a word processor
 - using large-face calculators (except for non-calculator section)
 - using talking calculators (except for non-calculator section)
 - providing an Augmentative Communication device
 - using a larger diameter or modified special grip #2 pencil
 - masking portions of the test booklet to eliminate visual distractors
 - transferring answers to the test booklet or answer folder by an examiner

Limited English proficient (LEP) students may be exempted from the statewide assessments if they fall below the state established cutoff score on the Language Assessment Battery or the Maculaitis Assessment Program and have participated in a bilingual, ESL or English Language Services program for less than two consecutive years or have attended school in the United States for three consecutive years or less prior to the test administration date. LEP students may be tested with one or more accommodations in the test administration procedures for both the ESPA and the GEPA. Accommodations that are permitted include the following:

- a small-group testing environment
- additional time
- translation of the test directions into the student's native language
- use of a bilingual dictionary

Additional time may be provided not to exceed 150% of the administration times indicated in

the examiner's manual for each test. Students who are receiving translated test directions need to be tested in a location separate from students tested with directions read in English only. If dictionaries are used, they may be provided by either the student or the school. Ideally, students should be using the same dictionaries as part of their instructional program. The dictionaries should be checked before testing begins to be sure that no papers or additional reference information such as loose sheets or other schoolwork is inside them.

3. *Does the state provide assessments in languages other than English? If so, describe. In what grades and subjects?*

The ESPA, GEPA and HSPT/HSPA are only available in English. For LEP students exempted from the HSPT and need to meet the high school graduation requirements, the **Special Review Assessment (SRA)** is available in ten different languages.

4. *Does the state provide alternative assessments for students with disabilities? If so, describe. For which students and in which subjects and at what ages?*

The state provides an alternate assessment for twelfth-grade students who have met all of the graduation requirements except for passing the HSPT. The SRA11 (Special Review Assessment) process was developed to provide this alternate assessment. District boards of education may administer the SRA to students with disabilities or students eligible under section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act if the IEP team or the 504 team determines that the student requires an alternate format to demonstrate knowledge and skills measured by the HSPA. Districts may also administer the SRA to LEP students who require an alternate format to demonstrate knowledge and skills measured by the HSPA.

Districts must also, at specific times prescribed by the Commissioner starting with the 2000-2001 academic year, administer the **Alternate Proficiency Assessment (APA)** to students with severe disabilities who cannot participate in other assessments due to the severity of their disabilities. The APA will measure the progress of students with severe disabilities toward achieving the Core Curriculum Content Standards for Students with Severe Disabilities.

The Department of Education will provide districts with guidelines for identifying students on a case-by-case basis who cannot participate in other assessments due to the severity of their disabilities and who, therefore, should participate in the APA.

5. *Does the state have a goal for the inclusion of students with disabilities and/or LEP students on the statewide tests? Does the state use any strategies to encourage the inclusion of students with disabilities? LEP students?*

ESPA, GEPA, and HSPA were designed as universal test instruments. Students whose district's Child Study Team exempt them from the statewide assessments must take some form of the APA. Also, the rationale for exemption must be submitted to NJDOE for prior approval.

6. *Are changes planned in the for the inclusion of SWD and LEP students in the state assessment system (proposed or enacted and to be implemented)? If so, what do these plans include? Why are these changes being made and what is the timeline? Are there implications for the state reporting or accountability systems (Title I or in general)?*

Starting with the 2001-2002 academic year, the **Alternate Proficiency Assessment (APA)** will be administered to students with severe disabilities who cannot participate in other assessments due to the severity of their disabilities.

Performance Standards

1. *How many and what performance levels has the state established for its assessments?*

ESPA and **GEPA** scores are reported as scale scores with a range from 100 to 300 with 300 as the highest possible score:

1. Partially proficient: score of 100-199
2. Proficient: score of 200-249
3. Advanced Proficient: score of 250-300

The scale score range on the **HSPT** is from 100 to 500; passing score is 300.

2. *Has the state set acceptable levels or targets for schools, districts or the state on tests, drop-out rates or other measures (e.g. 70% of students in Maryland pass the MSPAP)?*

The state system for 1999-2000 includes the requirement that districts meet the absolute target of having 75% of their students scoring at the proficient level on the ESPA and GEPA and passing the HSPT; although state code states that this will not be in place until July 1, 2000, it has been operational for this year.

3. *How are these performance standards calculated? What data are included in the calculations, and at what proportions (e.g. assessment results 60%, dropout and attendance rates 40%). How are the calculations made? What is the final unit of analysis for reporting school and district achievement levels (e.g. performance index, grade, category)?*

No indexing system or other complex calculations are used; the state simply determines if 75% of students tested have met the state standards.

4. *Are all students, schools and districts included in these performance calculations? If not, who is excluded?*

All students at grade levels four, eight, and 11-12 will take all appropriate statewide assessments as scheduled. All students assessed are included in these calculations.

5. *Are changes planned for the state performance standards (proposed or enacted and to be implemented)? If so, what do these plans include? Why are these changes being made and*

what is the timeline? Are there implications for the state reporting or accountability systems (Title I or in general)?

As outlined in New Jersey Administrative Code, Title 6A: Standards and Assessment for Student Achievement, Chapter 8 (adopted April 5, 2000):

- Beginning July 1, 2000, 75 percent of fourth- or fifth-grade students enrolled in a school or district who participate in the Statewide assessment program, except those with disabilities and those who have limited English proficiency, shall have scored at or above the proficient level on the ESPA, in each of the content areas assessed.
- Beginning July 1, 2000, 75 percent of eighth-grade students enrolled in a school or district who participate in the Statewide assessment program, except those with disabilities and those who have limited English proficiency, shall have scored at or above the proficient level on the GEPA, in each of the content areas assessed.
- Beginning July 1, 2005, the absolute criteria for student performance applied to the ESPA and GEPA will be 85 percent of students enrolled in a school or district who participate in the statewide assessment program, except those with disabilities and those who have limited English proficiency.
- Beginning July 1, 2000, 85 percent of 11th grade students enrolled in a school or district in October of their 11th grade year, except those with and those who have limited English proficiency, shall have scored at or above the proficient level in mathematics, reading, and writing on the October and/or April administrations of the HSPT in their 11th grade year.
- Beginning July 1, 2003, 85 percent of 12th grade students enrolled in a school or district as of October 15 of their 11th grade year, except those with disabilities and those who have limited English proficiency, shall have scored at or above the proficient level in all content areas assessed on the spring administration of the HSPA in their 11th grade year and/or the fall and spring administrations of the HSPA in their 12th grade year.
- Beginning July 1, 2002, district boards of education shall ensure that students with disabilities and students with limited English proficiency participate in the applicable statewide assessments.

6. *What proportion of schools and/or districts fail to meet acceptable levels on performance targets?*

Although it is not generally known statewide as to how many schools meet the benchmark of 75%, three school districts have been taken over by the state for failing to meet state expectations for district performance and administration (*see accountability section*). No districts are in Level III monitoring but two districts have received Level II sanctions (*see accountability section below*).

Reporting Performance Data

1. *Describe the characteristics of the state performance data reporting system (by whom, what data, who is the audience) for each of the following levels:*

- *Student reports*

No individual student test results are made public – only the child, his/her parents and the teacher have access to the scores. Individual student reports (ISRs) list a child’s scale scores in each subject tested, proficiency level, LEP, SpEd, IEP or Title I status, and the number of questions answered correctly out of the number asked.

- *School and District reports*

Average results for the school will be made public in the **New Jersey School Report Card**. The report cards also include: enrollment, language diversity, student attendance, average class size, student mobility rate, student/faculty ratio, faculty attendance rate, student/administrator ratio, faculty academic degrees, length of school day, instructional time, and district financial data.

- *State reports*

The state has also provided test scores to the press and made them available on the Internet by district and school, as well as the state as a whole. Scores are broken down only by subject area in the press. The Internet reports, however, provide scores by: GenEd, SpEd, LEP, and total students, as well as subject tested.

The Department of Education, after each test administration, must provide to chief school administrators the following:

- Rosters of student performance in each content area;
- Individual student reports; and
- District and school summary data, including school and district means, numbers tested, and percent achieving at each performance level, with district summary data aggregated and disaggregated, and school summary data disaggregated, for students with disabilities and for those who have limited English proficiency.

2. *How are the data distributed? When during the year (month or time period after assessment)? To whom (students, teachers, parents, the media, the community)?*

Data are distributed to districts through the use of a specific Internet site, separate from the general SDE web site, and managed just for this purpose. From this site, districts download data specific to schools, copy the information for distribution to schools and then schools are responsible for distributing the reports to students and parents.

3. *At what level(s) are data disaggregated (state, district and school levels)? For what groups are disaggregated data reported (see Internet sites for state, district and school level report cards)? Check on the following categories required by federal regulation:*

1) Gender, 2) Race, 3) LEP status, 4) Migrant Status, 5)SWD, 6) SES.

Although the state department of education collects data by all of these categories, the data are only reported by grade, LEP status and students with disabilities as disaggregated for the general public. The state is, however, planning to include disaggregated data on gender and migrant status for the 2000-2001 report cards and include all 6 categories of disaggregation in 2002.

4. *Does trend data exist from the state assessments (example: Texas State Assessment data is available from “1996-97 on”)?*

The earliest available HSPT results on the SDE Internet site date from the fall 1996 administration. The ESPA and GEPA scores for 1998-99 were the first scores generally published.

5. *How are the results of students with disabilities and limited English proficiency reported? Are they included in the aggregate scores reported to the public, or disaggregated by group?*

The results of both LEP and special education students are disaggregated and included in state reporting of local achievement by school.

6. *What are the state’s requirements for the use of data in school and district improvement planning?*

School-level improvement plans, or **quality assurance annual reports (QAAR)**, are submitted annually to the *county superintendents*, and should be based on assessment results. A QAAR includes information about the implementation of school-level plans, achievement of performance objectives, professional development activities, the condition of school facilities, the status of mandated program reviews, and community support data. The chief school administrator is required to make the QAAR, which contains the school-level plan and the pupil performance objectives, available to the public at a board of education meeting by October 30 of each year. Districts that have failed Level I monitoring and have therefore not been certified by the state are required to develop a plan to address their shortcomings as identified through the analysis of assessment data.

Annually, each school in a district must develop and implement a two-year plan based on information contained in the school report cards. This plan must include pupil performance objectives, a review of progress by teaching and administrative staff, and a description of parental involvement. Two or more pupil performance objectives must be developed in each school. If pupil performance is below minimum state standards, objectives to meet these standards must be developed. Interim benchmark performance levels must be set to measure the school's progress toward achievement of minimum state standards. If pupil performance is at or above minimum state standards, challenging objectives will be established.

8. *Are changes planned for performance reporting (proposed or enacted and to be implemented)? If so, what do these plans include? Why are these changes being made and what is the timeline? Are there implications for the accountability system (Title I or in general)?*

Beginning July 1, 2001, the Department of Education will report performance on the **APA** with the same frequency and in the same detail as it reports on other statewide assessments, including school and district means and the number and percentage of participating students. The Department of Education will only publicly report summary performance data if doing so would not compromise the confidentiality of individual students.

9. *What have been the major issues and challenges in the area of performance standards and reporting? Explain.*

The state has, over a number of years, been in the middle of an on-going process of changing the standards for schools as part of the three level monitoring system outlined below (see accountability section). The state has just passed new standards, moving the benchmark from 75% to 85% of students scoring at the proficient level on ESPA and GEPA. The issue will now be the implementation of these new requirements.

State Accountability System (1999-2000 school year)

1. *Provide a brief overview and history of the accountability system as the context.*

New Jersey's current general educational accountability system is designed to hold districts accountable for school performance and targets interventions accordingly. However, 30 poor and generally low-performing districts in the state which receive additional funding and services from the state, resulting from the State Supreme Court's decisions regarding *Abbott v. Burke* (to be referred to as **Abbott** Districts) have additional requirements for the state. Students are held accountable by the HSPT test for high school graduation.

2. *What are the characteristics of the state accountability system?*

- *Student Accountability/Rewards and Sanctions*

ESPA and **GEPA** are not promotion tests and students do not need to "pass" to proceed to the next grade. Students are required to pass the HSPT with a score of at least 300 and will also be required to pass the HSPA to graduate.

- *School Accountability/Rewards and Sanctions*

Accountability in the state is currently focused at the district level. However, the state has developed rewards for schools that are higher performing:

1. New Jersey has established an **Academic Achievement Reward Program** with \$10 million awarded annually to schools that attain absolute success in or significant progress toward high student achievement as measured by the state assessment system. Schools with 90% of students meeting state standards receive the absolute success reward. The remaining schools are divided into five bands based on their passing rates, and the 10% in each band with the highest level of improvement receive the significant progress reward. A per-pupil amount is determined by dividing the number of pupils taking the test in each of the qualifying schools into the \$10 million appropriation.

2. The SDE's **Best Practices/Star Schools Program** provides for monetary awards to schools. Ten Star Schools and fifty Best Practices are named annually based on a competitive process. Banners, certificates, and pins are presented at a statewide recognition ceremony in June, with additional recognition through the media. Each Star School receives \$1,000 and each Best Practices School receives \$500 for expansion, replication, and/or dissemination of the practice for which it won the recognition. Any New Jersey school

district is eligible to participate. The Best Practices/Star Schools Program selection criteria are revised each year to better reflect the Core Curriculum Content Standards and the Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standards (CCWRS).

- *District Accountability/Rewards and Sanctions*

Districts are held accountable by the state through a process of regular monitoring through the *county offices of education*. The 1988 School Intervention Law created a three-level monitoring process, based on 43 indicators, including:

- Implementation of the requirements to develop curricula
- Development of an annual plan to implement content standards and assessments
- Evaluation of tenured and non-tenured staff and development of professional improvement plans
- Implementation of a multi-year comprehensive maintenance plan
- Implementation of a uniform system of double-entry bookkeeping and Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP)
- Implementation of controls to prevent the over-expenditure of funds
- Correction of annual audit recommendations
- Implementation of health and safety plans for all school buildings.

One of the most important indicators is achievement on the state tests. Specifically, 75% of students taking the ESPA and GEPA must be proficient on these exams and pass the HSPT.

Level I: County superintendents monitor districts by conducting desk audits and on-site evaluation visits. The Commissioner recommends the certification status of each school district to the State Board based on this on-site evaluation. The recommendation can be for:

- State Board certification for seven years for district boards of education that meet standards for student performance and behavior as Group 1 school districts
- Conditional certification for districts that the county superintendent determines can correct identified deficiencies without additional monitoring or technical assistance from the department within a prescribed time frame
- Placement into Level II evaluation for those districts that do not meet established requirements and cannot correct deficiencies without additional monitoring and technical assistance.

Level II: Districts not certified upon their initial review are subject to the second monitoring level. These failing districts are required to develop a plan to address their shortcomings – district progress is monitored every three months, and failure to achieve the stated performance goals would lead to level three monitoring. Those in Level II go through an on-site evaluation by the county superintendent to determine compliance with all requirements, including:

- Completion of a Quality Assurance Annual Report (QAAR)
- The requirement to present the QAAR at a regular public district board of education meeting

- Implementation of a School-level plan
- Attainment of a three-year average pupil attendance rate of at least 90 percent
- Attainment of student performance standards and proficiency levels in accordance with statewide performance standards requirements
- Attainment of a dropout rate not exceeding 10% for pupils in grades 7-12
- Implementation of a board-approved substance abuse program
- Employment of appropriate certified personnel
- Implementation of an appropriate professional development plan
- Transmission of accurate enrollment data
- Proper administration of transportation services and contracts
- Completion of a long-range facility master plan
- Compliance with various other federal and state program requirements including bilingual education, special education, early childhood education, and technology planning.

The district board of education must report the results of the district monitoring at a public meeting. If the district is placed in Level II, the board must approve the district's corrective action plan. The county superintendent is responsible for informing the district of its monitoring responsibilities.

Level III: This level requires the development of corrective action plans by an external review team. Failure to implement this program could result in a state takeover of the school district.

Districts with schools which continue to fail have also fallen under New Jersey's "**academic bankruptcy law**," under which a districts can be taken over by the state. This has happened in three districts in New Jersey.

State Takeover

1. When a state takeover occurs, the failing district is placed under state control for at least five years. The state can remove the district superintendent and the local board of education and replace them with the state's own appointees.
2. Within six months of the state takeover the superintendent must present a corrective action plan and the district is then required to provide annual reports to the state on their progress towards implementing the corrective action plan and on its prospects for return to local control.
3. If after five years the state commission can not recommend return to local control the state may retain control of the district. To facilitate a transition back to local control, during the fourth year of state control the local municipality is allowed to begin electing some of its own board members – the process continues incrementally until full control is again local.

With the implementation of the new state assessment system, the state approved (as of

April 5, 2000: see changes question below) a system in which it will review the performance of schools and districts to ensure that 85% of students score at or above the proficiency level. The SDE will continue to evaluate districts and charter schools every seven years, but the evaluation would now be based on the performance of students in achieving at the proficient level as tested by ESPA and GEPA.

Abbott Districts

As part of the continuing Abbott decisions, it was been determined that:

the Chief School Administrator shall establish a districtwide accountability system that includes both a system of rewards to recognize teachers, parents, and administrators who contribute to helping students attain the Core Curriculum Content Standards (CCCS), and a system of sanctions to be applied when an individual school fails to meet State standards.

A system of rewards and sanctions will be developed for each school in the Abbott districts with input from a School Advisory Committee. This system will include recognition and rewards for those individual teachers, parents, and administrators that contribute to helping students attain the Core Curriculum Content Standards. At the same time, each Abbott district should develop, with input from building principals, a system of rewards for schools that achieve outstanding success and a system of sanctions available under existing rules and regulations that will apply when an individual school fails to meet state standards for achievement in any of the core content areas.

The 30 Abbott Districts in the state are responsible for the following inputs:

- The establishment of school management teams in each school that are responsible for the development of a whole school reform plan based on a needs assessment
- The development of full-day kindergarten for all five year-old students and half-day pre-school programs for all three and four year-old students
- The adoption of a whole school reform model by June 2001 in every elementary school in the district
- The submission of a revised plan for implementation of required programs in secondary schools
- The submission of an application for additional Abbott v. Burke state aid as part of the district budget, and
- The development of a long range facilities management plan.

The **Office of Program Review and Improvement (OPRI)** within the SDE focuses on ensuring accountability and improvement of student achievement in each of the 30 Abbott districts. The office reviews literature and collaborates with state and national experts on school improvement; organizes and facilitates the delivery of professional development services for the Department of Education (DOE); and develops evaluation data to track the progress of Abbott districts and schools.

3. *What methods of measuring progress are used in the state accountability system?*

The state system for 1999-2000 includes the requirement that districts meet the absolute target of having 75% of their students scoring at the proficient level on the ESPA and GEPA and passing the HSPT; although state code states that this will not be in place until July 1, 2000, it has been operational for this year (*see changes below*). Further, the changes to the system, as approved on April 5, 2000, state that the Department of Education will review the performance of schools and districts, initially using an absolute criterion, but subsequently incorporating a progress criterion indicative of systemic reform.

4. *Are all students included in calculating the measures of progress? If not, who is excluded (probe on inclusion of SWD and LEP students)?*

All students are not included. As outlined in New Jersey Administrative Code, Title 6A: Standards and Assessment for Student Achievement, Chapter 8 (adopted April 5, 2000), 75% of students are to score at the proficient level on the ESPA, GEPA and HSPT, *except* those with disabilities and those who have limited English proficiency.

5. *How do the general state accountability system and the system of accountability for Title I schools compare? Are they the same, or different? How?*

All schools must comply with the state monitoring progress and all Abbott districts must further comply with the additional regulations. The state has not established a definition of or process for determining if adequate yearly progress has been made in a school or district.

6. *Are subgroup performance results used as an indicator in the calculation of state accountability measures? If so, how? To identify schools or districts in need of improvement? For recognition and rewards?*

Subgroup performance is not an indicator; only general student performance is included.

7. *Are charter and/or non-public schools included in the accountability system? If so, how?*

Charter schools in the state must comply with the same monitoring regulations as “regular” public schools in the state, but non-public schools are not included in this system.

8. *Are changes planned for the state accountability system (proposed or enacted and to be implemented)? If so, what do these plans include? Why are these changes being made and what is the timeline?*

Student Accountability

As outlined in New Jersey Administrative Code, Title 6A: Standards and Assessment for Student Achievement, Chapter 8 (adopted April 5, 2000), the majority of New Jersey students will be awarded a high school diploma linked to the development of the knowledge and skills contained in the Core Curriculum Content Standards. The knowledge and skills will be developed through student participation in a local program of study including not fewer than **110 credits** in courses designed to meet all of the Core Curriculum Content

Standards. The 110-credit requirement could be met in whole or in part through program completion aimed at achieving the Core Curriculum Content Standards. Achievement of the knowledge and skills would be measured through the statewide assessment system, including the SRA and APA (*see previous Inclusion section*).

Students of limited English proficiency may demonstrate their knowledge and skills through the SRA process in their native language along with passing an English proficiency assessment, or they may demonstrate their knowledge and skills through the SRA process in English with accommodations. A state-endorsed diploma will be awarded to any student with disabilities meeting the alternate requirements of an IEP.

Adult high school instruction will include all content areas of the Core Curriculum Content Standards, and prospective adult high school graduates will become eligible for a State-endorsed diploma by passing all sections of the HSPA or SRA. As an alternative, adults may also become eligible for a State-endorsed diploma by passing the GED.

These new high school graduation requirements start with those students entering grade nine in the 1999-2000 academic year or those individuals planning to graduate from an adult high school in the 2002-2003 academic year.

Annual review and evaluation of school districts

As outlined in New Jersey Administrative Code, Title 6A: Standards and Assessment for Student Achievement, Chapter 8 (adopted April 5, 2000), the Department of Education will review the performance of schools and districts. This review shall take place at each grade level in which statewide assessments are administered, using the following criteria:

- Beginning July 1, 2000, 75 percent of fourth- or fifth-grade students enrolled in a school or district who participate in the Statewide assessment program, except those with disabilities and those who have limited English proficiency, shall have scored at or above the proficient level on the ESPA, in each of the content areas assessed.
- Beginning July 1, 2000, 75 percent of eighth-grade students enrolled in a school or district who participate in the Statewide assessment program, except those with disabilities and those who have limited English proficiency, shall have scored at or above the proficient level on the GEPA, in each of the content areas assessed.
- Beginning July 1, 2005, the absolute criteria for student performance applied to the ESPA and GEPA will be 85 percent of students enrolled in a school or district who participate in the statewide assessment program, except those with disabilities and those who have limited English proficiency.
- Beginning July 1, 2000, 85 percent of 11th grade students enrolled in a school or district in October of their 11th grade year, except those with disabilities and those who have limited English proficiency, shall have scored at or above the proficient level in mathematics, reading, and writing on the October and/or April administrations of the HSPT in their 11th grade year.
- Beginning July 1, 2003, 85 percent of 12th grade students enrolled in a school or district as of October 15 of their 11th grade year, except those with disabilities and those who have limited English proficiency, shall have scored at or above the proficient level in all

content areas assessed on the spring administration of the HSPA in their 11th grade year and/or the fall and spring administrations of the HSPA in their 12th grade year.

- Beginning July 1, 2002, district boards of education shall ensure that students with disabilities and students with limited English proficiency participate in the applicable statewide assessments.

The Department of Education will annually review individual school performance on applicable statewide assessments relative to achieving the Core Curriculum Content Standards according to the criteria specified above.

District boards of education will:

- ensure that each school that does not achieve State standards as determined by performance on applicable Statewide assessments develops and implements a school-level improvement plan including measurable objectives to address deficiencies identified by the assessments;
- ensure that each school that achieves State standards creates measurable school-level objectives that address improvement in any area contained within the Core Curriculum Content Standards;
- submit all school-level improvement plans and objectives annually to the county superintendents as part of the **quality assurance annual report (QAAR)**.

Charter schools shall submit all school-level improvement plans and objectives annually to the county superintendents as part of the annual report.

The Department of Education will, however, continue to evaluate a district board of education every seven years. The evaluation will be based, in part, on a district board of education's performance in achieving the proficiency levels of the Core Curriculum Content Standards as measured at each grade level in which statewide assessments are administered. A district board of education may be **certified** if it meets the applicable criteria listed above.

Beginning July 1, 2001, for the ESPA and the GEPA, and July 1, 2004, for the HSPA, a district board of education may be certified with conditions if it meets one of the following criteria of systemic reform:

- Achieving an increase of at least five percentage points in any passing rates initially at or above 50 percent of the class enrollment in the ESPA, GEPA, and HSPA, in each of the subject areas assessed, using the baseline data obtained in the previous academic year; or
- Achieving an increase of at least 10 percentage points in any passing rates initially at or above 25 percent of the class enrollment in the ESPA, GEPA, and HSPA, in each of the subject areas assessed, using the baseline data obtained in the previous academic year.

9. *What have been the major issues and challenges in the area of accountability? Explain.*

For a decade, education policy in New Jersey has been directly connected to the *Abbott v. Burke* decisions and the development of new policies to address the requirements of the State Supreme Court. The importance of these rulings cannot be overstated. The SDE has

developed new offices and programs to address the needs of the Abbott districts and provide support. The three level monitoring system has been in place in the state for over a decade as well; the issue has been how to fit the two systems together in Abbott districts.

Identifying and Assisting Low Performing Schools and Districts

1. *How are schools and districts identified as low performing? Using what criteria? Do the identification processes and/or criteria differ for Title I and non-Title I schools?*

Currently, districts are held accountable by the state through the three-level monitoring process (*see district accountability above*). Level III districts may be considered “low performing” and are given special attention by the state. Districts which continue to fail monitoring and do not provide evidence of the “willingness and ability” to improve have fallen under New Jersey’s “academic bankruptcy law,” under which a district can be taken over by the state.

2. *Does the district or the state decide whether a school is low performing? If the district is involved in the process, how much discretion do they have?*

The state is responsible for this decision, as districts rather than schools are identified and taken over by the state.

3. *What types of assistance are provided to these schools and districts by the state?*

The Level II evaluation process includes the following actions:

- The county superintendent of schools appoints an external review team to examine a district board of education. The state DOE pays the entire cost of activities associated with this review team.
The Commissioner directs the county superintendent to establish an open public meeting where parents, school employees and community residents may meet with the review team to discuss any concerns regarding the district. The meeting must be duly advertised.
- The external review team establishes which aspects of the board of education's operation to examine. This examination may be limited to deficiencies identified within the district, or may include all aspects of the district's operations such as education, management, governance, and finance.
- Within 45 days of its review, the external review team submits a report to the Commissioner. The report should include findings, conclusions, and directives that the district should use to develop and implement a corrective action plan to achieve Level 1 certification requirements; recommendations regarding the technical assistance the district will require to effectively implement the corrective action plan; and recommendations for measures to mitigate adverse community conditions that may affect the ability of students to learn.
- All findings in this report are transmitted by the Commissioner to the district board of education. The Commissioner directs the district to develop a corrective action plan to implement these findings and recommendations.

- The district board of education must discuss the external review team's findings at a special meeting within 30 days of formal notification.
- Within 60 days of formal notification, the chief school administrator must submit a corrective action plan approved by the district board of education to the Commissioner.
- The Commissioner reviews the district's corrective action plan and determines the cost of implementing it. The Commissioner also determines which aspects of the plan are already contained in the district board of education's current expense budget.
- Where appropriate, the Commissioner will reallocate funds within the district's budget to support the corrective plan.
- Within one year of the Commissioner's formal notification, the district must implement the approved corrective action plan. During such implementation, the Commissioner will ensure that the district receives appropriate technical assistance.
- Upon completion of the district board of education's corrective action plan activities, the county superintendent of schools determines the extent to which the standards for certification have been achieved and submits a formal report to the appropriate Assistant Commissioner.
- Lastly, the Assistant Commissioner submits a report to the Commissioner, recommending that the district be either:
 - a. recommended to the State Board for full certification
 - b. granted conditional certification, if the county superintendent determines that the remainder of the deficiencies can be remediated without further technical assistance within a prescribed time frame
 - c. granted an extended amount of time to correct any deficiencies
 - d. directed by the Commissioner to enter Level III evaluation pursuant to law.

N.J.A.C. 6:8 requires that a school that fails any section of a student performance assessment must develop an objective to address that failure and an action plan to remedy the situation. At the end of the first year, the county superintendent reviews the school's progress in implementing its plan. The Commissioner of Education is required to direct the district board of education to develop a corrective action plan to address assessment weaknesses.

After two consecutive years of failure, the Commissioner must assess the district's curriculum and budget and consider that assessment as part of the district's next annual budget submission. The Commissioner may also contract to perform the assessment and direct the cost to be included in the district's budget.

After three consecutive years of failure, in accordance with N.J.A.C. 6:19-2.3, the Commissioner is required to take corrective actions as described in section 9.

Abbott Districts

The Office of Program Review and Improvement (OPRI) oversees three Program Improvement Regional Centers where School Review and Improvement (SRI) teams are housed. It directs, trains, and assigns SRI teams to districts and schools. Through its field staff, OPRI provides assistance pertaining to the Whole School Reform (WSR) urban education initiative to districts and schools. In addition, this office assists districts receiving

Early Childhood Program Aid (ECPA) and Demonstrably Effective Program Aid (DEPA). OPRI collaborates closely with the Office of Fiscal Review and Improvement (OFRI) as well as with other divisions and offices within the department in areas related to the WSR initiative and student achievement of the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards. The focus of their work is to ensure accountability and improvement of student achievement in each of the **Abbott districts**. The office reviews literature and collaborates with state and national experts on school improvement; organizes and facilitates the delivery of professional development services for the Department of Education (DOE); and develops evaluation data to track the progress of Abbott districts and schools.

4. *Who provides the state assistance?*

The state is the primary provider of technical and other assistance to districts that are in Level II or III monitoring. More specifically, the *Office of State-Operated Districts* is responsible for coordinating and supporting department policy-making for the state-operated school districts including strategic planning and personnel oversight and for implementing initiatives designed to promote innovation in the state-operated school districts. The office also participates in the development of the annual plans to assure accountability and improvement of student achievement in the state-operated school districts with the Office of Program Review and Improvement and the Office of Fiscal Review and Improvement.

Abbott Districts

The *School Review and Improvement (SRI)* teams consist of staff from the Divisions of Student Services and Finance. SRI team members are trained in Whole School Reform (WSR). This staff provides both programmatic and fiscal knowledge, as well as technical assistance related to urban education reform and student achievement of New Jersey's Core Curriculum Content Standards to schools and districts. SRI teams are based at the Program Review and Improvement Regional Centers (PIRC's) located in northern, central, and southern New Jersey. An SRI team is assigned to each elementary school implementing WSR, and to each secondary school to facilitate WSR exploration, implementation, and the development of the Required Programs in Secondary Schools (RPSS). The teams assist districts and schools in identifying training and resource needs, focus assistance on school-level plans to develop a prescription for school improvement, and work with district and school-level teams in problem-solving, planning and building systems and capacity to support school achievement. The teams also identify expertise and resources to facilitate district and school improvement efforts.

The state has also assigned a **Special Assistant for School Improvement**, who is responsible for assisting the Commissioner internally to coordinate the Department of Education's effort to evaluate and assist schools where students are at risk of not achieving the Core Curriculum Content Standards. The special assistant participates in the development of the annual plans to assure accountability and improvement of student achievement in each **Abbott** district, along with other districts identified as having failing schools by the Offices of Program Review and Improvement and Fiscal Review and Improvement. The special assistant also serves as the Commissioner's principal representative to educators, parents, and other citizens in communities served by unsuccessful schools.

5. *Does support to Title I and all low performing schools and districts differ? Is support generally provided for all schools and districts, or are services specifically designed to help those that are low performing?*

No, assistance has been focused on Abbott districts and those taken over by the state; assistance is not specific to Title I schools. Staff from the county and state Title I Offices are, however, available to provide technical assistance.

6. *Has the state established a set of criteria and/or a process for getting schools and districts out of low performing status? If so, what do they include?*

Districts may move out of Levels II or III if they are certified by the state as meeting all of the state requirements. State operated districts must also become certified by the state as Level I, and cannot move into Level II or III status as interim steps in the process of improvement. Therefore, they are held to the highest standards in the state.

7. *Once a school or district is identified as low performing, what types of plans must it prepare? Who are they submitted to once completed? How do they differ from other planning documents?*

Level II districts are required to develop a plan to address their shortcomings, and district progress is monitored every three months. Level III requires the development of corrective action plans by an external review team. Failure to implement this program could result in a state takeover of the school district.

Within six months of the **state takeover** the superintendent must present a corrective action plan and the district is then required to provide annual reports to the state on their progress towards implementing the corrective action plan and on its prospects for return to local control.

8. *Are changes planned for the state system of identifying and assisting low performing schools or districts (proposed or enacted and to be implemented)? If so, what do these plans include? Why are these changes being made and what is the timeline?*

With the implementation of the new state assessment system, the state approved a system in which it will review the performance of schools and districts to ensure that 85% of students score at or above the proficiency level. The SDE will continue to evaluate districts and charter schools every seven years, but the evaluation would now be based on the performance of students in achieving at the proficient level as tested by ESPA and GEPA.

Title I and Adequate Yearly Progress

1. *What criteria are included in the definition of adequate yearly progress for schools and districts under Title I?*

In the past, before the state had designed and implemented the ESPA and GEPA, districts and schools were administering locally determined standardized assessments, such as the California Achievement Test (CAT) and the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS). Under this practice, districts had been responsible for working with county superintendents to establish targets for adequate yearly progress.

ESPA, GEPA and the HSPT/HSPA have become and will be the criteria for adequate yearly progress in the state.

2. *What are the definitions of adequate yearly progress for the following:*

- *Title I schools and non-Title I schools*
- *Targeted vs. schoolwide programs, charter, non-public and small schools*
- *Districts*

Are these transitional or final definitions? If transitional, when will the final definitions be in place and what criteria and processes will they include?

Since the implementation of ESPA and GEPA, the state has developed a proposal for the state standard of adequate yearly progress. The specific definition has not yet been approved by the state or externally by the United States Department of Education. The state hopes to submit its proposal to the USDOE in July.

The proposed definition would be an improvement measure, so that schools and districts would need to show an increase in the number of students scoring at the proficient level on the ESPA and GEPA and passing the HSPT/HSPA, with the target placed at 75% of students passing. The state has also been considering the system used in North Carolina as a model for the New Jersey system.

3. *What is the process for identifying those schools and districts that are not making adequate yearly progress under Title I? Does the district or the state make this determination for schools? If the districts plays a role, does the state provide guidance on local criteria?*

The state has determined that schools and districts not making adequate yearly progress for two consecutive years would then be considered as in need of improvement.

4. *What are the criteria and processes for identifying schools and districts in need of improvement under Title I? What plans must be prepared? How can a school or district get out of Program Improvement? Does the district or the state make this determination for schools?*

The state has not been in the practice of identifying such schools and districts specifically for Title I, but will do so once a process has been established. All districts, regardless of Title I

status, go through the three-level monitoring process. As will be the case under the new general accountability system throughout the state, all improvement plans and objectives will be submitted annually to the county superintendents as part of the quality assurance annual report (QAAR).

5. *What types of assistance are provided to those in need of improvement under Title I?*

Title I schools and districts work with county offices of education. These offices collect assessment data, review improvement plans, meet with district officials, review a district's, quality assurance annual report (QAAR), provide assistance in the analysis of district and school level assessment data, help districts to set performance goals and develop plans for improvement.

6. *Who provides the assistance?*

The state's twenty-one county offices of education continue provide many of the services to Title I schools even though the definition and targeting process for adequate yearly progress has been transferred to the state level.

7. *Have waivers played a role in this process?*

No, waivers have not played a role.

8. *Are there future plans for the state system for schools or districts receiving Title I funding (proposed or enacted and to be implemented) or for the definition of adequate yearly progress? If so, what do these plans include? Why are these changes being made and what is the timeline?*

The definitions and processes specific to Title I schools are still in the proposal stage and so future plans include the establishment of a definition of adequate yearly progress.

9. *Is there alignment between Title I and non-Title I systems for adequate yearly progress?*

Although the state has not had a generally established definition of adequate yearly progress, it would seem that the proposals outlined for Title I are not in alignment with the state system of monitoring and state takeover. All districts, however, regardless of Title I status, go through the three-level monitoring process and may be identified as Level II or Level III.

10. *What have been the major issues and challenges in the area of Title I? Explain.*

Many of the Title I schools in the state can be found in the Abbott districts, and the emphasis on the requirements for reform in Abbott districts has shifted the focus of reform in high poverty schools away from Title I as the traditional provider of services for such schools. The increased funding and support given to Abbott districts has significantly augmented the funds provided through the Title I program.

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