



# Your Guide to the HSPA

New Jersey Department of Education  
High School Proficiency Assessment March 2014

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This pamphlet answers the most frequently asked questions about the eleventh-grade graduation test, the High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA), and explains its importance to your child's education. The information describes what the HSPA measures, why the assessment is given, how the results are reported, and why it is important for your child to do well on the assessment.

## Questions and Answers

### 1. What is the HSPA?

The HSPA is a state test given to students in the eleventh grade to measure whether they have gained the knowledge and skills identified in the Core Curriculum Content Standards. These standards, adopted by the State Board of Education, identify what students should know and be able to do at the end of various benchmark years. The HSPA will help determine whether your child is making satisfactory progress toward mastering the skills he or she will need to graduate from high school. Students who enter the eleventh grade on or after September 1, 2001, must pass the Mathematics and Language Arts Literacy sections of the HSPA as a graduation requirement. The HSPA measures eleventh-grade achievement of the Core Curriculum Content Standards. In March 2014, all first-time eleventh-grade students will take the HSPA and receive test scores in Mathematics and Language Arts Literacy.

### 2. Why is my child required to pass the HSPA?

In 1988, the New Jersey State Legislature passed a law (18A: 7C-6.2) that requires all students who graduate from a public high school in New Jersey to demonstrate mastery of skills "... needed to function politically, economically, and socially in a democratic society." These skills are defined in the Core Curriculum Content Standards in the areas of Mathematics and Language Arts Literacy.

### 3. In what other ways are the HSPA test results used?

Local school districts use the results to determine the appropriateness and strength of the local curriculum and to develop remedial programs to

help students improve their knowledge and skills. The results are also used to satisfy federal requirements under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

### 4. Are children classified as special education required to take the HSPA?

The HSPA is designed to give high schools information about how well all students have mastered the Core Curriculum Content Standards, including students with learning disabilities. Special education students will be working toward achieving the standards at levels appropriate for them and with any accommodations or modifications they may need. These accommodations are defined in their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). The accommodations or modifications should be the same as those used by these students in other classroom testing, and may include Braille, extended testing time, or a different testing site.

While most special education students will take the HSPA, there will be a small percentage of students with the most severe disabilities for whom some of the content standards are not appropriate. The New Jersey Department of Education has identified those standards that are appropriate for students with severe disabilities. The department recently developed a different kind of tool to measure the achievements of special education students who are exempt from taking the HSPA. The new assessment, the Alternate Proficiency Assessment (APA), was taken by students for the first time in November 2001. This portfolio assessment will document student performance in Mathematics and Language Arts Literacy. Every student with a learning disability must take each content area of the HSPA unless the IEP team determines that your child will participate in the APA. Parents and guardians of children with disabilities should discuss participation in the HSPA, and any necessary accommodations, at the child's IEP meeting.

### 5. Must students identified as limited English proficient (LEP) take the HSPA?

Yes. All limited English proficient (LEP) students must take each content area of the HSPA. LEP

students are provided accommodations and modifications during testing, which can include a translation dictionary, translation of the test directions, extended testing time, or a small group testing environment. Parents and guardians should meet with the school bilingual/ESL coordinator to discuss appropriate testing accommodations and modifications for LEP students.

## 6. When is the HSPA given?

The HSPA is administered to all first-time eleventh-grade students in March of the eleventh grade. The test will be administered over a three-day period. Your child will spend approximately two and one-half hours each day taking the HSPA. Students who do not pass all sections of the test will be able to retest in October, and again in March and October of next year, if necessary. Students must retake only those sections not yet passed.

### HSPA TEST SCHEDULE FOR 2014

#### March 2014

**Regular Test Dates**

**March 4, 5, and 6**

**Make-up Test Dates**

**March 11, 12, and 13**

#### October 2014

**Regular Test Dates**

**October 7, 8, and 9**

**Make-up Test Dates**

**October 14, 15, and 16**

## 7. What does the HSPA measure?

The HSPA measures achievement of eleventh-grade knowledge and skills in the areas of Mathematics and Language Arts Literacy as described in the Core Curriculum Content Standards.

### Mathematics

The Mathematics Section will be administered on March 4, 2014. This section requires students to solve problems of basic mathematics, algebra, and geometry. The Mathematics Section contains two

types of questions. Most questions are multiple choice; students select the correct answer from four choices. Other questions are open-ended and are scored by highly trained raters. Students are required to write their answers or to explain or illustrate how they solve mathematical problems. The Mathematics Section tests student knowledge of the following skills:

- Number and Numerical Operations
- Geometry and Measurement
- Patterns and Algebra
- Data Analysis, Probability, Statistics, and Discrete Mathematics

### Language Arts Literacy

On March 5 and 6, 2014, students will take the Language Arts Literacy Section of the test. The reading component requires students to read passages and to answer related questions about each passage. Most of the test questions are multiple choice; however, some questions require students to provide written responses using their own words, usually in the form of written paragraphs.

These questions are referred to as “open-ended” questions and are scored by highly trained raters. Reading passages are used to test comprehension, both literal and inferential. Literal comprehension is the ability to understand the actual meaning of written words. Inferential comprehension is the ability to use careful reasoning to extend understanding of the communication beyond the literal meaning of the words themselves. Questions are based on those skills that critical readers use to understand, analyze, and evaluate text.

The writing component requires students to respond to two writing prompts. One prompt presents a topic and requires students to develop an expository essay using an example from literature, history, science, film, or their own lives as support for their ideas. The other prompt provides a topic and requires students to write a persuasive essay based on that topic. These two tasks measure your child’s ability to construct meaning in sustained written responses.

The writing prompts used on the HSPA were carefully screened and pretested to assure that they

are fair and interesting and that they will not offend students. Both teachers and parents helped to select these prompts.

### **8. How is the HSPA developed?**

Test passages and items for the HSPA are developed and then reviewed by state-level committees for Mathematics, Language Arts, and Sensitivity before and after they are included in the test. New Jersey teachers and other educators participate in the committee review process. All test passages and items for the HSPA were subjected to a rigorous field test before they were included on the graduation test.

### **9. How were the proficiency levels set for each test section?**

Proficiency levels for the Mathematics and Language Arts Literacy sections of the HSPA were established in 2002 by experienced educators who recommended proficiency levels for each test section based on 2002 test performance. With the committees' recommendations, the State Board of Education, in consultation with the Commissioner of Education, adopted the standards which established the proficiency levels. A procedure called statistical equating is used to make sure that all future scale scores are equivalent to those established for the March 2002 test.

### **10. How is the HSPA scored?**

The multiple-choice questions are machine-scored by a company hired by the New Jersey Department of Education. Each correct response to a multiple-choice question counts as one point; students are not penalized for guessing. The same company also conducts the scoring of all open-ended items in Mathematics and Language Arts Literacy. The company has a staff of raters who undergo extensive training and are continuously monitored during the scoring process.

The total number of points make up a score known as the raw score. The raw scores are then converted into scale scores, which are the scores that are reported for Mathematics and Language Arts Literacy. These scale scores are your child's HSPA scores.

### **11. How are the open-ended questions scored?**

Each open-ended question in Mathematics and Language Arts Literacy is scored by two independent, trained raters using a scale that ranges from 0 to 3 in Mathematics and 0 to 4 in Language Arts Literacy. The raters' scores are averaged for each open-ended question; then, the student's scores on the multiple-choice and open-ended questions are combined to get the total scores for Mathematics and Language Arts Literacy.

### **12. How are the essays scored?**

Essays in the Language Arts Literacy Section are scored using a method developed by the New Jersey Department of Education called Registered Holistic Scoring. The essays are rated on a six-point scale from 1 to 6. They are judged on four features of writing: organization/content, usage, sentence construction, and mechanics. Each essay is judged by two independent raters whose scores are then combined to calculate the total essay score.

### **13. Is there a single "passing" score on the HSPA?**

No. Students must pass each section of the HSPA. The scores on each section of the test range from 100 to 300 and the passing score is 200. Each section of the test is scored separately. In order to pass the entire HSPA, a student must obtain a passing score of 200 on each section.

### **14. What types of scores and reports will I receive for the HSPA?**

Your child will receive an Individual Student Report (ISR) that contains his or her scores in Mathematics and Language Arts Literacy. For each section of the test, there will be a total scale score, and raw scores for each reporting cluster. The total scores will be reported in one of three proficiency levels: Advanced Proficient (pass), Proficient (pass), or Partially Proficient (fail). Scores that fall in the Partially Proficient level

indicate that the student has not met the minimum level of proficiency required. A copy of the Individual Student Report must be given to you; another copy is kept at the school in your child's file. This report is available only to the student, his or her parent or legal guardian, and school personnel deemed appropriate by the Commissioner of Education.

**15. What happens if my child does not pass one or more sections of the HSPA in the eleventh grade?**

Students who fail any section of the HSPA in March of the eleventh grade have two more opportunities in the senior year to take the test again. Students must retake only the section(s) of the HSPA not yet passed. Once a student passes a section of the HSPA, he or she does not have to take it again.

In addition, these students must be given a comprehensive assessment and must be provided with supplemental remedial instruction targeted to their individual needs. Instruction may be provided in separate remedial classes that meet before, during, or after regular classes, or may be provided through tutorials, summer programs, or even as part of a student's regular classes. The school must inform you about the remedial instruction your child will receive.

**16. What happens if my child does not pass all sections of the HSPA by the twelfth grade?**

A student whose score is below 200 (partially proficient) in any content area of the HSPA, and is expected to complete all state and local graduation requirements in the twelfth grade (for a June or summer graduation) is eligible for the Alternative High School Assessment (AHSA) process. The AHSA allows students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills required on the HSPA. A team of educators, after examining other evidence, determines whether the student has attained enough of the required skills to achieve the equivalent of a passing score on the HSPA. The school must consult with you as part of the AHSA process.

Students who have fulfilled all of the course requirements for graduation but fail the HSPA will not receive a high school diploma. A student in this situation has the following options:

- Continue the AHSA process;
- Return to the school at the time of testing the following year and take the HSPA; or
- Pass the Tests of General Educational Development (GED).

**17. If my child passes all sections of the HSPA and we move to another school district in New Jersey, must my child be tested again?**

No. The HSPA is a statewide test taken by all public school eleventh graders throughout New Jersey. Scores on the HSPA become part of a student's permanent record and, therefore, the school district must forward test scores to the new school district if a student relocates. Even if a student leaves school and then later returns, he or she would not be tested on any sections of the HSPA previously passed.

**Your Limited English Proficient (LEP) Child**

**18. Are the graduation testing requirements the same for LEP children?**

Yes. Students who are identified as limited English proficient (LEP) must meet the same graduation requirements as native English speaking students. LEP students who score below 200 in any of the HSPA content areas may participate in the AHSA process if they are expected to complete all state and local graduation requirements (for a June or summer graduation) when they reach twelfth-grade status. LEP students may demonstrate proficiency in the required content areas through completion of the AHSA in the native language or in English. In order to be eligible for an AHSA in the native language, LEP students must meet the following criteria:

- Scored below the state-established cut-off score on one of the state approved English language proficiency tests;

**AND** have either

- Participated in a Bilingual, ESL, or English Language Services Program for two consecutive years or less prior to the date of HSPA testing;

**OR**

- Attended school in the United States for three consecutive years or less prior to the date of HSPA testing.

Your local school district will determine whether your child meets the requirements to complete the AHSA process in the native language. Students who take the AHSA in the native language must also pass an English fluency test in order to receive a high school diploma.

### **Your Child with an Educational Disability**

#### **19. Are children classified as eligible for special education and related services required to pass the HSPA?**

The Individualized Education Program (IEP) defines the graduation requirements, including testing, for each special education student. If a child's IEP does not include a specific exemption from passing any section of the HSPA, then that child must pass all sections of the HSPA as one of the requirements for a high school diploma. A student exempted from passing a section of the HSPA must take the exempted section once. The score on the exempted section will not affect the student's graduation status. A student with a disability may be tested through the Alternative Proficiency Assessment, rather than by taking the HSPA, if it is determined appropriate by your child's IEP team.

#### **20. Can accommodations or modifications be made to the testing environment to accommodate my special education child?**

Yes. Accommodations and modifications might include such aids as a Braille or large-print version, a different testing site, an extended amount of time for testing, or similar types of accommodations. You should meet with the child study team in your district to discuss necessary accommodations or modifications for your child.

All accommodations and modifications must be specified in your child's IEP.

#### **21. Will the high school diploma my special education child receives be affected by whether he or she was exempted from passing the HSPA?**

No. Currently, there is only one type of state-endorsed, locally issued high school diploma in New Jersey. If your child meets the requirements of his or her IEP, he or she will receive a state-endorsed diploma.

### **Your Child in a Vocational or Technical School**

#### **22. Must my child who is enrolled in a vocational or technical school pass the HSPA?**

Yes. Students who are enrolled in vocational and technical programs at comprehensive high schools or who attend shared-time or full-time vocational/technical schools must pass the HSPA as one of the requirements for a high school diploma. Mastery of the skills tested by the HSPA was identified as necessary for all students. These skills are the foundation for all other learning, including vocational and technical skills.

#### **23. If my child did well on the Grade Eight New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJASK 8), why does he or she have to take the HSPA?**

The NJASK 8 tested eighth-grade skills that indicate progress toward mastery of the essential skills that are tested on the HSPA. The NJASK 8 did not directly measure your child's eleventh-grade skills. Therefore, your child's NJASK 8 scores cannot substitute for his or her scores on the HSPA.

#### **24. How can I find out whether my child is progressing toward learning the required skills?**

You should speak first to your child's teachers, particularly those who teach mathematics, English, and remedial skills. Other school staff who could help you are the principal, the guidance counselor, the basic skills coordinator, the mathematics or English department chairperson, and the English as a second language (ESL) teacher and/or the

bilingual/ESL coordinator if your child is limited English proficient.

## 25. What can I do at home to help my child pass the HSPA?

Your child's teachers can suggest specific ways for you to help your child at home. In general, you can help by:

- Showing an interest in your child's work;
- Letting your child know that you have high expectations for his or her work;
- Providing a study area;
- Setting homework and study time every day;
- Asking to see your child's assignments and test results; and
- Making sure your child attends school regularly.

In order to have a secure test administration, students are not permitted to have cell phones or any other electronic devices in any testing room. If your child has a cell phone or any other unauthorized electronic devices while in a testing

room, the test section for that day will be voided and your child will have to wait for the next scheduled test administration to complete the test.

## 26. How can I find out more about the HSPA?

The New Jersey Department of Education has prepared a variety of materials to help parents and teachers prepare students for the HSPA. These materials (this pamphlet, for example) are provided through your child's school and via the New Jersey Department of Education web site. Further information about the HSPA and your child's progress toward development of the skills tested is available at your local high school or district office.

Information about the HSPA is available on the New Jersey Department of Education web site at:

[www.state.nj.us/education](http://www.state.nj.us/education)

or by contacting the Office of Assessments at:

P.O. Box 500  
Judge Robert L. Carter Building  
Riverview Executive Plaza, Building 100  
Trenton, New Jersey 08625-0500  
(609) 292-8739