

NEWARK TEACHERS UNION

AFT

LOCAL 481

Teachers, Aides and Clerks

AFL - CIO

PREOCCUPIED WITH STANDARDS-BASED ASSESSMENTS?

FRAMEWORKS

RUBRICS

TEST
SPECS

CCCS

AYP

HSPA

GEPA

NJ-ASK3

NJ-ASK4

ART BY BARBARA OSTROVSKY, MCKINLEY SCHOOL



THE NEWARK TEACHERS UNION CAN HELP!!!!



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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

**COLLABORATION IS ESSENTIAL TO IMPROVE THE
NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND ACT, AS WELL AS
TEACHING & LEARNING IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS**



**NTU PRESIDENT
JOSEPH DEL GROSSO**

The No Child Left Behind Act's (NCLB) impact on public education is growing throughout the country. Although most of its goals are worthwhile, the way NCLB seeks to implement them has precipitated a good deal of controversy.

One of NCLB's more contentious mandates is the accountability system that could lead to significant sanctions and possibly the demise of countless public schools unless ALL public school students achieve adequate yearly progress (AYP) on the states' mandated standards-based assessments.

Although laudable, this goal is both statistically and practically impossible and needs to be revised.

Despite this obvious weakness, as New Jersey's standards-based assessment results on the next page indicate, teaching and learning has to change dramatically to improve student achievement. This requires a true collaboration among the New Jersey Department of Education, district administrators and instructional staff, parents, and students. This document, the NTU, & the Newark Public Schools (NPS) will attempt to provide guidance and resources for this collaborative endeavor.

In addition, even though NCLB identifies

nine core academic subjects, it only mandates and holds schools, districts, and states to accountability standards in Language Arts Literacy and Mathematics, and eventually Science. What will happen to the public schools' commitment to New Jersey's Core Curriculum Content Standards as an increasing number of public schools fail to achieve NCLB's-mandated adequate yearly progress (AYP)? Will their priorities and commitment to the CCCS change? I hope not!

The NTU and our national organization (AFT) have joined lobbying efforts to change a number of NCLB's provisions, including:

1. Ensuring full federal funding of its mandates.
2. Establishing high but realistic criteria for AYP; and
3. Establishing research-based criteria for "highly qualified" principals who control all school-based resources, including NCLB's mandated "highly qualified" teachers and paraprofessionals. (see page 23 of this publication).

In Solidarity,

Joseph Del Grosso

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INTRODUCTION

As the chart on this page indicates, the task public school staff, students, and parents collectively face to achieve NCLB's-mandated AYP goals is daunting. In order to fully collaborate and improve student performance, all stakeholders (e.g. NJDOE staff, district and school-based administrators, instructional staff, students and their parents) must become actively involved in the process. Throughout this document we offer an array of activities and resources for all these stakeholders that the NTU & the Newark Public Schools (NPS) have already begun to implement.

Even though the NJDOE has produced a significant array of resources that can assist us in our endeavors; many of these resources are not available in a user-friendly format and/or timely fashion.

For example, if you are a 4th,

8th, or 11th grade teacher, student, or their parent, it's not easy to filter out the available resources for your particular needs.

This publication and its referenced supporting documents attempt to address this limitation. Therefore, if you are a 3rd grade teacher, an 8th grade science teacher, or an 11th grade math teacher and want all available resources referenced in this document you can access them in a user-friendly fashion at the NTU & the NPS. In addition, we didn't just restrict our collections of resources to the subjects covered on the standards-based assessments. All NJDOE resources that relate to the Core Curriculum Content Standards (CCCS) & the standards-based assessments have been collected and collated for all grade levels for you to access and to share with your students and their parents.

All these resources, including the CCCS, Cumulative Progress Indicators (CPI), Framework activities, sample tests & questions, Rubrics, etc. can be accessed electronically by e-mailing us (mm@ntuaft.com) visiting the NTU or NPS web pages (<http://www.ntuaft.com>) & (<http://nps.k12.nj.us>). You can also get printed copies of these resources by visiting NTU's Education Resource Center

In addition to identifying and describing available NJDOE resources, this document provides research-based instructional strategies to prepare our students for these standards-based assessments. In this endeavor, we make recommendations that address the format and content of the assessments, through a variety of venues.

ADEQUATE YEARLY PROGRESS (AYP) RATES OF NEW JERSEY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

THESE RESULTS DO NOT INCLUDE APA TEST RESULTS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS, WHICH WERE NOT YET AVAILABLE.

GRADE LEVEL - TEST	TOTAL # OF SCHOOLS	# OF SCHOOLS FAILING TO MAKE AYP	% OF SCHOOLS FAILING TO MAKE AYP
HIGH SCHOOLS - HSPA - 11TH GRADE	361	271	75%
MIDDLE SCHOOLS - GEPA - 8TH GRADE	722	352	49%
ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS - NJ ASK 4 - 4TH GRADE	1,365	275	20%

THE NJDOE HAS A LARGE ARRAY OF HIGH QUALITY RESOURCES THAT EDUCATORS, STUDENTS, & THEIR PARENTS CAN UTILIZE TO IMPROVE STUDENT SUCCESSES ON THE STANDARDS-BASED ASSESSMENTS

Administrative leadership is needed to ensure that teachers, parents, and students have the resources they need to allow students to perform at their personal-best on the standards-based assessments. In this section we identify and describe available resources and offer suggestions on how to access and utilize them.

1. Core Curriculum Content Standards (CCCS) -

These standards describe expectations for all students in different grades & subjects. They are the road map that guides each district's curriculum and the development of the State's standards-based assessments.

Consequently, the CCCS and its supporting documents (CPI, Macros, Strands, & Frameworks) are critical resources for educators, parents, and students to rely on in preparing students for the standards-based assessments.

Frameworks have been developed for each content area and for each grade grouping, based on the content. They are filled with many suggestions for classroom implementation of the standards, as well as for dealing with inclusion and how to manage instruction.

Many of these activities have a research-base demonstrating effectiveness in improving achievement in particular subjects and grade-levels. These activities cover limited grade clusters (e.g. elementary, middle, secondary, or K-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8, 9-10, & 11-12).

2. Alignment of CCCS & standards-based assessments -

It's critical that the NJDOE ensures that the standards-based assessments are closely aligned with the CCCS. If this doesn't occur, there is a discrepancy between what is being taught and what is being assessed, and districts, schools and students will experience additional problems in achieving NCLB-mandated AYP goals.

3. Standards-Based Assessments

The NJDOE provides sample tests for each grade/subject, as well as test specifications, rubrics for open-ended questions, and samples scored student responses on previous administrations of the State's Tests. These resources can be used to improve stakeholders' understanding of the scoring process, and to increase their understanding of the type of item presented on the tests.

4. The NJDOE provides districts a variety of reports of test results

These reports can assist districts, schools, teachers, parents, and students to:

- a. Analyze and interpret the results of standards-based assessments;
- b. Identify strengths and weaknesses; and;
- c. Make data-based instructional & programmatic decisions to improve teaching & learning.

Probably, the two most useful reports that can assist stakeholders in making data-driven instructional and programmatic decisions are:
Individual Student Reports (ISR) -

Districts are provided with two of these reports for each student - one for the parents and one for the teacher. These reports can be utilized by teachers, parents, and students to identify specific academic areas that require individual attention.

For example, a teacher can analyze the test scores of all last year's students, as well as current students, to identify areas of strengths and weaknesses to make instructional & curriculum adjustments.

Student Rosters - These reports provide a list of students and how they performed in each content cluster, as well as the knowledge and skills for each content.

With these invaluable reports, districts, schools, & teachers should be able to make data-driven instructional & programmatic decisions to improve teaching and learning. (see example on pages 16 & 17) However, the failure of the NJDOE to provide test results and reports in a timely fashion severely limits the ability of stakeholders to develop and implement needed interventions.

5. Appropriate utilization of the above resources

These NJDOE resources can help ensure that all students, parents, teachers, and administrators know what to expect on and how to prepare for the standards-based assessments. In this way, instructional and programmatic decisions become more informed, research-based, and data-driven. Clearly, staff development and parent training is needed in this endeavor. (pages 20 - 21)

HOW CAN STAKEHOLDERS UTILIZE NJDOE RESOURCES TO IMPROVE TEACHING & LEARNING?

District Administrators Must:

Utilize the standards-based assessments to provide accountability and diagnostic information to improve teaching and learning by:

1. Aligning district curriculum, instruction and assessments to the CCCS & the state's standards-based assessments; and
2. Providing diagnostic information on the performance of individual and groups of students, including their strengths and weaknesses relative to the state standards. In this endeavor they can utilize NJDOE's "Interpretation Manuals", "Summaries of District & School Rosters", as well as "Student Rosters" for each standards-based assessment, and intervene instructionally and programmatically. (see examples of this type of analysis on pages 16 - 17)

School-Based Administrators Must:

1. Provide more guidance for staff and parents on preparing for, understanding and utilizing the standards-based assessments to ensure that educational decision making is data-driven.
2. Set high, but realistic expectations for each school's AYP goals & short-term objectives with ongoing feedback and reinforcement at the school, including all grades, subjects, classrooms, and students.. These goals should also take into account NCLB's safeguards for special education and LEP students.
3. Ensure that the school's Education Media Center, web-page, instructional facilitator, & parent center have copies of all available NJDOE resources for the corresponding grades/subjects of the school's stu-

dents, in a user-friendly format so that staff, parents, and students can access them;

4. Develop and provide instructional staff with examples of:
 - a. Curriculum-based assessments that utilize the same format as the State's standards-based assessments, for all subjects & grades;
 - b. Detailed lesson plans, where the format of each standards-based assessment is highlighted and includes teaching strategies, learning activities and assessment tools;
5. Provide parent activities & resources that will help parents to assist their children succeed on standards-based assessments, including parent workshops. Each of the standards-based assessments have student/parent preparation booklets, in English and Spanish, that could be used for class activities and parent workshops. (see page 20)
6. Ensure that instructional staff & students have access to instructional technology to assist in the teaching & learning of the CCCS and preparing for the standards-based assessments. For example, one of the major problems students have on the writing sections of the standards-based assessments is ensuring that written work is organized and includes opening, middle and closing paragraphs. The NPS has two software programs that assist in this process - "Kidspiration" for K to 5 students and "Inspiration" for older students. Each school's Technology Coordinator is critical in this endeavor;
7. Ensure that special education and LEP students are provided with mandated and allowable test accommodations; and
8. Ensure that test administration set-

tings provide maximum comfort for students (lighting, noise, familiarity with teachers);

Teachers may wish to:

1. Review the CCCS & CPI with their students and have laminated printouts for the corresponding standards posted in a prominent place in their class;
2. Utilize the Curriculum Frameworks in designing lessons and planning activities; and
3. Continuously review and utilize rubrics, possibly displaying posters of the rubrics in the corresponding sections of their rooms.

Access NTU Resources

The NTU has compiled and organized these resources by grades & corresponding subjects that teachers can access and utilize to help their students learn the corresponding CCCS and prepare for the state's standards-based assessments. We have modified NJDOE's resources into more user-friendly formats to provide easy access to this valuable information. These resources are available electronically at <http://www.ntuaft.com> & <http://www.nps.k12.nj.us>, or by e-mailing the NTU at mm@ntuaft.com.

NTU'S RESOURCE CENTER ALSO HAS HARD COPIES OF ALL THESE STATE PRODUCED RESOURCES, AS WELL AS THE FACILITIES TO HELP YOU REPRODUCE, LAMINATE, &/OR DEVELOP POSTERS FOR YOUR CLASS.

HOW CAN WE BEST USE THE LIMITED AMOUNT OF TIME WE HAVE TO PREPARE OUR CURRENT STUDENTS FOR THE STANDARDS-BASED ASSESSMENTS?

New Jersey's standards-based assessments are administered at different times of the year. These schedules set limits on the time-periods we have to plan and prepare our students for these assessments. This is particularly problematic for NJ ASK, GEPA, and HSPA assessments that are given in March. Clearly, backward mapping is required to adequately plan for all the assessments, especially when they don't allow for a full year of teaching and learning.

Time Constraints In Teaching & Learning Skills & Knowledge

Logic and experience demonstrate that the more time students are actively engaged in assigned instructional activities, the greater the likelihood that they will learn the assigned material.

Consequently, teachers who allocate more time to and actively engage students in a given skill area and knowledge-base are more likely to have students who achieve higher in that area. Therefore, district policies, school scheduling priorities, and teachers' lessons must ensure sufficient time is allocated for the development, practice, and reinforcement of the knowledge & skills measured on the standards-based assessments.

Because of time constraints to instruct students on all content and skills covered on standards-based assessments prior to the administra-

tion of the State's tests, the following strategies should be considered:

1. Curriculum Mapping

Teachers and administrators can schedule the specific concepts and skills that need to be presented and mastered prior to the administration of the state's tests during the school calendar. Attention should also be paid to moving students from less difficult to more complex & demanding tasks within each area of learning.

2. Curriculum Integration

Teachers can integrate concepts in several lessons, so that content and skills taught in one subject are reinforced in another subject:

- a. Utilize writing, reading, and/or math rubrics in social studies & science classes;
- b. Assign a variety of reading & writing texts in different subjects to assist students in understanding different types of expository reading comprehension selections; and
- c. In Language Arts Literacy, teachers can have students read short passages that they wrote in other subjects and have them revise and edit each other's writing, based on respective rubrics.

3. Prioritize subjects, content, and skills

Based on the content and skills tapped on the standards-based assessment, the district, school-

based administrators, and teachers must ensure that sufficient time is allocated for students to learn these contents and skills. This may require a change in emphasis and timing of curriculum and instructional activities. In addition, individual/groups of students may require additional time allocations to learn skills and contents.

4. Transference of Knowledge

Help students see the connection between knowledge and skills learned in class to tests.

- a. When concepts and skills are presented in class, take a minute to discuss how these concepts or skills may be presented on the State Test.
- b. Provide students with specific questions from former test administrations that depicts the manner in which the concept or skill may be presented.

Limited Student Engagement

Even after teachers and administrators ensure that there is sufficient time allocated for the students to learn the required skills and content to prepare for the standards-based assessments, a good deal of guidance is required to ensure that students take advantage of this allocated time. For example, if we can increase students' engaged time by 25 minutes each day, they would be provided with an extra 75 hours of learning in a school year. The research-based strategies delineated on the next page can increase student engaged time:

HOW CAN WE BEST USE THE LIMITED AMOUNT OF TIME WE HAVE TO PREPARE OUR CURRENT STUDENTS FOR THE STANDARDS-BASED ASSESSMENTS?

1. Behavioral Management

Effective School/classroom management practices must ensure that allocated time actually becomes engaged time;



Picture by Barbara Ostrovsky, Art Teacher McKinley School

2. Practice

It is only after a great deal of practice that students can perform a skill with speed and accuracy, as required on standards-based assessments. Consequently, teachers could provide classroom instruction, class work, homework, projects, tests, etc. that utilize similar types of multiple choice and open-ended questions, multiple step and timed tasks to reinforce the students' experiences and successes with these formats:

- a. Provide time after each practice activity for feedback, clarification, and reinforcement. Discuss items missed and the thinking or misunderstandings that led to mistakes and how to avoid mistakes in the future. Reteaching with different examples & perspectives may be necessary.
- b. Utilize the NJDOE's Frameworks, rubrics, & sample tests in classroom activities for each subject and grade.

3. Motivation

By motivating students to learn the content of the subjects covered, and the format of the standards-based

assessments, their engaged time will increase. The following research-based strategies can be employed by schools, teachers, & parents to assist students in this endeavor:

a. Effective Feedback

- Is specific to a criterion (e.g. test taking skills, knowledge) and provides students with an explanation of what they are doing that is correct/incorrect.
- Is timely;
- Reinforces student's effort and provides recognition for progress towards learning goals (e.g. knowledge and skills, as well as speed and accuracy, for standards-based assessments); and
- Teaches and encourages students to monitor and reinforce their own performance (e.g. charting their own accuracy &/or speed on assigned tasks).

b. Goal Setting

Helping students identify goals and connect their learning to those goals fosters intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Therefore, individual and group goal setting for what students are expected to learn can provide a roadmap & sense of progress that can motivate continued student effort.

c. High Teacher Expectations

Research demonstrates that student achievement is enhanced when

teachers communicate high expectations for their students.

d. Match task assignments to student's skills

Research demonstrates a close relationship between on-task & off-task behavior and the difficulty of academic tasks. If the curriculum is too difficult relative to the student's academic skill level, excessive performance demands are created. This may then result in higher levels of off-task behavior to escape difficult and frustrating academic tasks. Conversely, students' engaged time increases when they work on academic tasks on his/her instructional level. Therefore, a curriculum-based assessment may be needed to determine mastery, instructional, and frustration levels for each subject to match instruction to students' needs. (see page 19) Attention should be paid to moving students from less difficult to more complex & demanding tasks within each area of learning.

For copies of the CCCS, CPI, Framework activities, sample tests & questions that correspond to the teacher's assignments, & NTU's Guide on curriculum-based assessments, visit these web pages <http://www.ntuaft.com> & <http://www.nps.k12.nj.us> or e-mail the NTU at mm@ntuaft.com, &/or visit NTU's Education Resource Center, where staff can assist you in making laminated posters of some of these resources.

HOW WE CAN BEST PREPARE OUR STUDENTS TO SUCCEED ON THE FORMAT OF NEW JERSEY'S STANDARDS-BASED ASSESSMENTS?

New Jersey's standards-based assessments are criterion-referenced, contain multiple choice and open-ended questions and are timed. It's critical to consider these factors when preparing for & analyzing the assessment results. The NJDOE has long, comprehensive Test Specification booklets, as well as more user-friendly Student/Parent Guides that educators, students, and parents can reference to familiarize themselves with what to expect on the various standards-based assessments. The NTU has also prepared a user-friendly synopsis of each test's specifications. You can access all these resources electronically by e-mailing your request (mm@ntuافت.com), visiting the NTU or NPS web pages: <http://www.ntuافت.com> & <http://nps.k12.nj.us>, and in print at NTU's Education Resource Center.

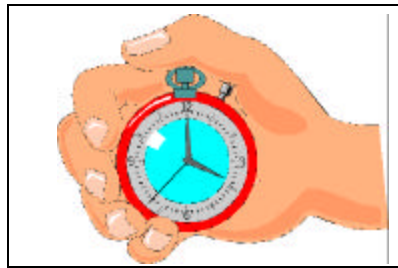
1. THERE IS ONLY A LIMITED AMOUNT OF TIME THAT STUDENTS HAVE IN EACH SECTION OF THE ASSESSMENTS

All assessments and corresponding sections are time-delineated; therefore, time & speed are critical to optimize success. With that in mind, teachers may:

- a. Provide instruction and practice on how students can focus on a test's essential tasks:
- Teach students how to break tasks into essential steps and then

how to allocate time accordingly.

- Question students to help them focus on the essential items of tasks they face.
- b. Provide students with instruction and practice on time allocation for various tests' tasks and types of questions, in isolation and together.



- c. Provide students with numerous opportunities to take timed tests to build their speed, accuracy, & confidence when working with these formats, and prevent test panic.

d. Instruct students on general test taking strategies:

- Pacing - Students need to be aware of the amount of time they need for each test item & pace themselves accordingly;
- Provide structure - Students can be taught how to approach each test's sections:
 - * The first go-through: Answer questions you know.
 - * Second go-through: Answer other questions as best you can.
 - * Third go-through: Review answers, correcting and completing anything that may have been missed during the first three.
- Ensure that students check and recheck various selections;

- Use graphic organizers - This is a research-based non-linguistic representation that can help students plan and allocate time for test components and/or multi-step problems.

2. THE DIFFERENT FORMATS OF THE QUESTIONS REQUIRE DIFFERENT TYPES OF PREPARATIONS AND STRATEGIES

Each standards-based assessment has two types of questions - multiple choice and open-ended questions.

a. Multiple choice questions

Most questions are multiple choice with a weight of one point for each correct answer. These questions require the student to choose one correct answer from 4 choices.

There are proven strategies on how to best approach multiple choice questions (e.g. narrowing down choices, when to guess & not guess, etc.) and teachers can provide instruction and practice on these skills.

For example, for each question, students should first eliminate the one or two answers that are the most evidently incorrect responses. Next, have the student select the best possible response from the remaining choices.

By eliminating incorrect responses, this process narrows the possi-

HOW WE CAN BEST PREPARE OUR STUDENTS TO SUCCEED ON THE FORMAT OF NEW JERSEY'S STANDARDS-BASED ASSESSMENTS?

ble solutions and consequently a selection from the remaining choices is more likely to be correct. Teachers can provide instruction and practice on these skills for various subjects and at various grades, including social-problem solving skills.

b. Open ended questions:

- Are fewer in number;
- Give more points for each answer that increases in quality;
- Tend to require more time to answer.
- Require students to answer with short or long written responses in their own words and they can use diagrams, graphics, &/or pictures;
- Utilize a variety of scoring rubrics to judge the quality of the responses; and
- Require an array of skills that students need to learn, practice, and receive reinforcement.

Open-ended questions - Rubrics

The scoring rubrics delineate what is expected in a student's responses to open-ended questions. Not only can they be used to improve teaching & learning in respective subjects, but they show what the assessor will be looking for and how students can earn partial credit on each question.

All students, parents, and teachers need to know the rubrics that will be used to evaluate open-ended

questions. Schools must ensure that students know and are successful in meeting these expectations. In this endeavor, teachers may utilize the following strategies:

- Utilize the Scoring Rubrics to evaluate student products all year;
- Display students' work in the school and classroom that demonstrate the scoring rubrics for corresponding subjects.
- Plan and implement activities that reinforce rubric expectations (e.g. lessons, homework, class work, tests, and projects.)
- Have students correct and score their own &/or classmates' work;
- Display a laminated printout for subject's rubric in the corresponding part of the class to keep students and teachers focused on the criteria;

- Study the state's sample student responses and the assigned scores to get a realistic picture about what is expected. Teachers tend to overestimate the quality of their students' open-ended responses; therefore, goals that underestimate expectations are reinforced.

NTU'S RESOURCE GUIDE ON HOW TO INTRODUCE, REINFORCE, & UTILIZE NJDOE'S RUBRICS TO IMPROVE TEACHING & LEARNING CAN ASSIST YOU IN THESE ACTIVITIES

For a copy of NJDOE's Rubrics, NTU's Resource Guide on Rubrics, visit the NTU (<http://www.ntuaft.com>) or NPS (<http://www.nps.k12.nj.us>) web pages, e-mail the NTU (mm@ntuaft.com), or drop into NTU's Education Resource Center for printed copies that we can help you laminate and develop posters, which you can display in the appropriate locations of your classroom.

THE CONTENT OF THE STANDARDS-BASED ASSESSMENTS

New Jersey's standards-based assessments are criterion-referenced assessments that are based on the CCCS, Macros, and the cumulative progress indicators for the various subjects and grade-levels. Language Arts Literacy and Mathematics sections are on all the assessments and Science is also on the GEPA.

In the next section we provide guidance on how to prepare students for the content of the various types of questions they will find on standards-based assessments. However, because science scores are not considered when determining AYP, it will not be addressed. We will also identify typical problems our students experience on the various sections and offer research-based effective strategies that educators and students may wish to employ to address these problems.

USING EFFECTIVE RESEARCH-BASED STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE ON THE READING SECTIONS OF THE STANDARDS-BASED ASSESSMENTS

The LAL sections of the standards-based assessments seek to assess students' knowledge & skills in the five Core Curriculum Content Standards, as delineated in the respective cumulative progress indicators (CPI). The various tests assess student's knowledge and skills utilizing reading & writing tasks that require students to work with or interpret text; analyze/critique text; & extend understanding of text.

All assessments have two reading selections, one that is a narrative text that is written primarily to tell a story. It has a strong thematic focus, follows a typical narrative structure, and contains traditional narrative elements. On all the reading selections, students respond to multiple choice and open-ended questions linked to the various texts. The reading texts have increasing lengths based on the grade-level & all utilize the Reading Open-Ended Scoring Rubric.



Picture by Barbara Ostrovsky, Art Teacher McKinley School

Problem - The stories included in the State Tests are often long and challenging (NJ-ASK - 1,200 to 1,800 words; GEPA - 2,100 words; & HSPA - 3,300 words) . Therefore, by the time students go to respond to the questions, they have run out of time.

SOLUTIONS

1. Gradually increase the lengths of assigned reading passages & the number of questions for each passage.

Early in the year, provide shorter passages and gradually build up students' endurance over months. Using State Test Samples, or other reading materials, break down the material into timed steps to improve students' ability to respond to long passages. Practice each step as a class, then individually.

For example, for NJASK, the first 3 minutes may be spent reading the questions. The next 12 minutes may be spent reading the story. The remainder of the time should be spent on the questions, 6-7 minutes for the multiple choice, and 3 minutes for the open-ended.

At first, it will be difficult for students. After practice, students become more proficient. Many valuable skills should be developed during these activities. Students should learn to skim for information, pace their reading, and read with comprehension.

2. Fluency Instruction

- Model fluent reading;
- Engage students in repeated monitored oral reading of the same selection, which is reasonably easy for them; and
- Monitor student progress in reading fluency and utilizing research-based strategies such as curriculum based assessments (see page 19).

Problem - The reading comprehension sections of the State's assessments are more challenging than many students can handle.

SOLUTIONS

Students should receive weekly practice with a variety of questions and reading passages similar to those experienced on standards-based assessments. Teachers could supplement these experiences by teaching and reinforcing an array of research-based comprehension strategies that students can utilize before, during, and/or after a reading selection:

1. Monitoring comprehension

Using appropriate fix-up strategies, flexibly and in combination, when they don't understand what they are reading students can:

- Slow down the speed,
- Identify where the difficulty occurs and reread the section that causes difficulty,
- Restate the difficult sentence or passage in his/her own words, and
- Look back through the text, and look forward in the text for information that might help to resolve the difficulty.

USING EFFECTIVE RESEARCH-BASED STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE ON THE READING SECTIONS OF THE STANDARDS-BASED ASSESSMENTS

2. Questions

Instructing students on how to utilize & ask questions to guide and monitor reading, such as reading questions posed by assessment;

3. Text Structure

Instruct students on how to recognizing and utilize text structure (e.g. narrative versus expository) to answer test questions.

4. Summarizing

Instruct students on how to utilize graphic organizers to create a synthesis of and interconnection of the important ideas in a text.

5. Before Reading Activities

Instruct students to activate prior knowledge by thinking about what they know about the text structure, subject they are reading about, questions the assessment posed about the text, etc.

6. During Reading Activities

Help students make connections and see relationships between important events, concepts or ideas they might otherwise miss. Teaching students to diagram questions can help in this endeavor.

Problem - Students spend too much time trying to find an answer to a multiple choice question on the reading section

SOLUTIONS

1. Teach, practice, & reinforce effective student skimming of reading passages & mining of information. This alone will improve their ability to find specific information in a sea of text.

2. Utilizing state test samples, have students read the questions first and identify the page where the item was found by placing a small pencil mark on the side of the paragraph.

3. Teach, practice, & reinforce effective use of graphic (pictorial representation) and semantic organizers (spider-web of lines that connect central concept to related ideas/events). These help illustrate concepts and interrelationships among concepts in a text.

4. Teach students to quickly read the multiple choice questions before reading the story. Then, as the students read the story, they can put a pencil mark next to places in the text that refer to each question.

5. Practice Eliminating Incorrect Responses - Provide students with reading passages and after they have read the story, work together to answer the multiple choice questions. Explain that for each question, students should first eliminate the two answers that are most evidently incorrect. This narrows the possible solutions and provides more time to consider the two most probable answers.

Problem - Students experience problems allocating time between open-ended and multiple choice questions on the reading sections of the standards-based assessments.

SOLUTIONS

1. Provide students with instruction and a good deal of practice on timing and pacing. Providing reading selections that include both multiple choice questions and open-ended questions that must be answered in a limited amount of time sets the stage. Explain that open-ended questions will require more time to answer than the multiple choice questions.

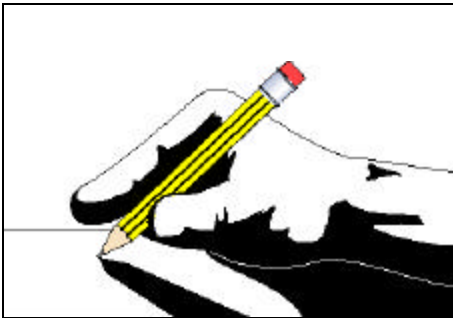
Students can be taught how to answer the simpler questions quickly, thus leaving more time for the open-ended questions. It is important for students to learn how to pace themselves by being aware of how much time they spend on each item.

2. Provide instruction and practice on scoring open-ended reading comprehension questions. Using three state samples of students' open-ended responses and the open-ended scoring rubric, ask students to give each sample a score from 1-4. Have a discussion about what the question was asking for and what criterion students used to judge the quality of the responses. Assist students to understand that the response does not need to be a long passage. All that is required to receive a score of 4 is to respond to all aspects of the question and provide examples from the story. If too much time is spent on open-ended items, then less time is available to answer the multiple choice questions.

USING EFFECTIVE RESEARCH-BASED STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE ON THE WRITING SECTIONS OF THE STANDARDS-BASED ASSESSMENTS

New Jersey's standards-based assessments require two writing projects in response to different prompts. One is always a picture prompt that requires students to speculate as to what is happening or might happen. The other is either a poem or persuasive prompt, based on the assessment.

Most tasks require the student to write a paragraph or more in response to the prompt and they all utilize the 0 to 6 point New Jersey Registered Holistic Scoring Rubric to score the students' responses.



Many of the research-based strategies delineated under teaching reading comprehension (e.g. prior knowledge, text structure, graphic organizers, summary, etc.) can be utilized for writing, and writing can reinforce these reading comprehension skills.



Picture by Barbara Ostrovsky, Art Teacher McKinley School

Problem - At times, even excellent students perform poorly on the State Writing Tasks because students may not have included a component that the Registered Holistic Scoring Rubric (RWSR) identified as essential.

SOLUTIONS

1. Teach students the details of the RWSR, provide them with practice utilizing the rubric, and effective feedback when implementing it.
 - a. Emphasize that if a student does not have an opening and a closing that the best he/she could score is a 3.
 - b. Explain that the scorers give each paper an initial score for Content and Organization. Then they "adjust" the score based upon the cumulative score of the other three areas (usage, mechanics, and sentence structure).
 - c. Provide students with many experiences to learn how responses are scored emphasizing the importance of certain skills over others.
2. Teachers can ask small groups of students, using a student's essay from the state's sample, to:
 - a. Place the papers in ascending order, based on the quality of written responses.
 - b. Make a list of the criterion they used to evaluate the quality of the papers.
 - c. Compare each groups' lists, combine, and make a class list.
 - d. Say how their respective lists differed from the state's rubric.
 - e. Review how the state scored the student essay & discuss the implications for these scores.

Problem - A student may be familiar with the criteria utilized by the Registered Holistic Scoring Rubric; yet, they still perform poorly on written work.

SOLUTIONS

Provide student(s) with more structured & guided experiences to improve written work utilizing the RWSR as a guide:

1. Assist student(s) in editing and revising an essay.
2. Provide students a structure to guide for editing & revising texts:
 - a. The first read through attempt to find spelling and mechanical errors.
 - b. The second read through rewrite sentences or paragraphs to make them coherent.
 - c. The third read through will be to add descriptive language.
 - d. The last read through will be to find anything that may have been missed during the first three.
3. Then, ask students to score the paper and ask them to verbally explain how they scored the paper by using the Registered Holistic Scoring Rubric. Assist them with questioning techniques that help them focus on essential elements such as an opening and closing, clear language, and correct grammar.
4. Ask students to revise the samples by adding descriptive language that would make the story more interesting to the reader.
5. Ask them to write the words beginning, middle and end on the area where this is represented. Discuss how the story could be more cohesive or interesting if any of these elements were changed.
6. Utilize instructional technology

USING EFFECTIVE RESEARCH-BASED STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE ON THE WRITING SECTIONS OF THE STANDARDS-BASED ASSESSMENTS

(e.g. Kidspiration, Inspiration) in ensuring that students' writing is organized, coherent, and includes essential details.

Problem - Students often spend too much time either preparing for writing or writing, then they do not have enough time to revise their work.

SOLUTIONS

Teachers need to provide students with instruction on and opportunities to practice their timing on writing assignments.

1. Once students are familiar using the rubric have them practice writing tasks by breaking down the allotted time into specific steps. Practice the steps as a class, then individually. Breaking written assignment into multiple steps and allocating time to each step provides the student with a useful strategy
2. Let's assume the writing task is allocated 25 minutes

a. Step 1 - Prewriting (2 minutes)

Ask students not to create elaborate webs. It is advisable to have students write "beginning", "middle" and "end" with information next to each.
 Beginning -
 Middle -
 End -

b. Step 2 - Write First draft (10 Minutes)

Write a story about the prompt (picture or poem). Students should be told that the reader is looking at the quality of their writing, not the entertainment value of their story. There is no correct story, just quality writing samples. During the 10 minutes, they

should not stop to correct spelling or mechanical errors. Explain to students that they should write with a free flow of thoughts and ideas.

c. Step 3 - Read through for clarity of ideas; sentence and paragraph structure (3 Minutes)

After writing their initial draft, students should review their story and ask the following questions:

- Is there an opening and a closing?
- Is every paragraph a complete paragraph?
- Is every sentence a complete sentence?

d. Step 4 - Read through for spelling and mechanical errors (3 Minutes)

Students should review the story for punctuation, spelling, and mechanical errors.

e. Step 5 - Read through to add descriptive language (3 Minutes)

Students should read each sentence and think about how they can make it more interesting by adding descriptive language.

f. Step 6 - Final read through for clarity of ideas; opening and closing (4 Minutes)

The student should read the entire document and make any final adjustments.

Problem - The writing portion of the standards-based assessments requires students to write for a limited amount of time in response to a variety of prompts.

SOLUTIONS

1. Provide students with the format for writing essays from the various

prompts (e.g. picture, poem, persuasive text) utilized in the respective assessments they will take.

2. Frequent experience in writing is essential for the development of student's writing skills. Provide students with many opportunities to write for a variety of purposes and audiences. Writing in all content areas should be encouraged. Teachers should be encouraged to use student journals and free writing exercises. In these writing activities students should be encouraged to generate a topic, plan a piece of writing, write, revise, and edit.

Problem - Students and teachers often overemphasize the mechanics of writing instead of the overall construction of students' writing.

SOLUTIONS

One area that is easy to address is to ensure the presence of a concrete opening and closing. Without an opening or closing the highest score a student can earn is 4 points.

There are four basic features that are assessed when evaluating student performance on writing tasks:

- a. Content & organization;
- b. Usage;
- c. Sentence Construction; and
- d. Mechanics.

NJDOE's Author's Self-Reporting Form on the following page can assist the teaching & learning of the writing skills utilized in the writing rubrics.

NJDOE'S AUTHOR'S SELF-REPORTING FORM

<u>RHSM FEATURES</u>	<u>OVERVIEW</u>	<u>DESCRIPTIVE CRITERIA</u>	<u>STRENGTHS (+)</u>	<u>NEEDS(+)</u>	<u>COMMENTS ABOUT WRITING STRENGTHS & NEEDS</u>
CONTENT & ORGANIZATION	EXTENT TO WHICH THE RESPONSE IS: - FOCUSED ON TASK, PURPOSE, AND AUDIENCE; - SUPPORTED BY RELEVANT AND ELABORATED DETAILS; & - CLEARLY & LOGICALLY ORDERED.	1. OPENING & CLOSING; 2. SINGLE CLEAR FOCUS; 3. SENSE OF UNITY; COMPLETENESS; 4. EVEN DEVELOPMENT OF KEY IDEAS; 5. LOGICAL PROGRESSION OF IDEAS; 6. APPROPRIATE & VARIED DETAILS; 7. CLEAR TRANSITIONS; 8. COHERENCE & FLUENCY; 9. CONTROLLED COMPOSITIONAL RISKS (IF APPLICABLE)			
USAGE	EXTENT TO WHICH THE RESPONSE IS WRITTEN IN STANDARD WRITTEN ENGLISH	10. CORRECT TENSE FORMATION; 11. SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT; 12. CORRECT PRONOUN USAGE & AGREEMENT; 13. EFFECTIVE & VARIED WORD CHOICE; 14. USE OF PROPER MODIFIERS;			
SENTENCE STRUCTURE	EXTENT TO WHICH THE RESPONSE INCLUDES COMPLETE & CONTROLLED SENTENCES	15. CORRECT SENTENCE CONSTRUCTION (SYNTAX); 16. VARIETY IN LENGTH & STRUCTURE; 17. CONTROLLED USE OF WORDS & PHRASING			
MECHANICS	EXTENT TO WHICH THE RESPONSE IS TECHNICALLY CORRECT	18. FEW ERRORS IN SPELLING; 19. FEW ERRORS IN CAPITALIZATION; 20. FEW ERRORS IN PUNCTUATION			

The Author's Self-Reporting Form incorporates the features and criteria of holistic scoring of both 8th & 11th grade student writing responses & provides greater involvement of individual students in the evaluation of their own writing. It helps students and teachers identify strengths and needs, as well as increasing their awareness & understanding of the elements of effective writing. In addition, it incorporates the key elements of the writing process: self assessment at all stages of draft-development, revising, editing, student-teacher conferencing, peer conferencing, and monitoring individual growth over time.

The form can be critical in improving individual student writing. Teachers can use the form as an instructional tool emphasizing that it will be used to evaluate students' writing. The form can be used by the teacher to provide feedback to students on individual writing assignments. The students can be required to hand in a completed form for selected, or each writing assignment, and the teacher's feedback would help students focus on their ability to accurately self-assess written work. These individual student forms can be used to track & document student progress over time by both the student and teacher. They can also serve as a focal point for student/teacher conferences, as well as parent/teacher conferences. Prior to the conference have student use the form to review his/her written work, with/without the parent, identifying strengths and weaknesses, and how weaknesses can be addressed (e.g. instructional activities). This allows for more individualized attention to student's needs.

The teachers can also use these forms collectively to identify patterns of strengths and weaknesses to plan instructional and programmatic interventions. It can provide teachers and administrators with the present collective status of students' writing abilities. This type of evaluation is key to discovering instructional, curricular, and programmatic strengths and weaknesses to identify, develop, and implement instructional & programmatic interventions to improve student writing (e.g. staff development, group students, etc.).

The Author's Self-Reporting Form can also be modified for 3rd to 7th grade student writing.

USING EFFECTIVE RESEARCH-BASED STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE ON THE MATHEMATICS SECTIONS OF THE STANDARDS-BASED ASSESSMENTS

Mathematics presents a unique challenge for educators and students. It is very troubling that nation wide only 31% of all 4th grade students & 27% of all 8th grade students are at, or above, proficiency in math and the math proficiency of 12th grade students has not improved since 1996. While a good deal of research is available on how to effectively teach reading, the available research on mathematics is not as extensive. However, the National Research Council published a report in 2002 (*Adding It Up: How Children Learn Mathematics*) that outlines areas in which mathematics education is considered solid, including a minimum of one hour instruction per day.



Picture by Barbara Ostrovsky, Art Teacher- McKinley School

Clearly, much more scientifically-based research is needed to develop effective teaching & learning strategies for mathematics. The Federal government is now sponsoring a systematic program of research to improve curriculum and instruction of mathematics in a number of venues.

Problem - A significantly lower % of students are achieving proficiency on the mathematics sections than Language Arts Literacy sections on all the state's standards-based assessments.

SOLUTIONS

1. Ensure that all stakeholders are familiar with the format and content of the math sections of the standards-based assessments:
2. Provide students with multiple experiences to practice solving math problems that utilize the same format & content of the standards-based assessments. These experiences should also involve curriculum integration, where the content clusters (e.g. number sense, concepts, & applications; spatial sense & geometry; data analysis, probability, statistics, & discrete mathematics; and patterns, functions, & algebra) are integrated into other subjects, such as science, social studies, art, language

arts literacy, etc.).

3. Based on recent research findings (*Horizon - "Looking Inside the Classroom: A study of K - 12 Mathematics and Science Education in the United States"*):

- a. Teaching & learning should place a greater emphasis on students making sense of mathematics, solving real life problems, & explaining their work and mathematical thinking.
- b. The evaluative components of the lessons should assess the students' ability to make sense of and apply the mathematical knowledge & skills that were taught.
- c. High quality lessons need to be identified and analyzed to determine essential characteristics that make them effective.
- d. Staff development and documents, such as New Jersey's Frameworks, could then provide these model lessons and characteristics, perhaps in the form of a rubric.

4. Teachers should also consider the following TIMSS recommendations for strong mathematics lessons:

- a. A mathematical goal focused on understanding;
- b. Development of concepts as contrasted with simply giving formulas;
- c. Coherence within the lesson;
- d. The use of multiple solution strategies; and
- e. Gradually increasing the level of the task.

Problem - Students have difficulties with the multi-step math problems found on the standards-based assessments.

SOLUTIONS

1. Research has shown that the "key-word strategy" can mislead students and stand in the way of making sense of the problem. Therefore:
 - a. Instruction should focus on making sense of problems;
 - b. Assessing whether there is additional knowledge needed before they can solve for the final answer. These are the intermediate steps that make problems multiple steps.
 - c. Visualizing what is happening in the problem.
 - d. Translating the representations into written math.
 - e. Checking back at the end to make sure the

question posed has been answered.

f. Stressing the need to label numbers (e.g. 36 packages, 8 pens) so what an answer represents that does not get lost.

2. Many students aren't successful on these questions because they do not respond to all the questions presented for each open-ended item, or they do not provide enough details or specificity. To assist students with long, multi-step, open-ended questions, teachers should provide instruction, practice, and reinforcement on:

- a. "Diagramming the Question" in order not to miss essential elements;
- b. Teaching, practicing, and reinforcing these skills throughout the school year will help build confidence and improve performance on multi-step problems.
- c. Utilize an example from the State Test Samples and ask students what the question asked for. As students state the items, diagram the question by writing something like: question #1...example #1; question #2...example #2. Every time an open-ended question is presented, the question's essential components should be displayed.

3. Too often students are only given simple one-step problems in class; consequently, they are deprived of practice in thinking through more complex solutions. a. As early as possible, multi-step problems should be introduced to the students, especially when using word problems.

b. Display and compare various strategies for solving problems. Show how each uses appropriate steps in thinking.

4. Provide students with one problem at a time. After students have completed the problem, work through each item and discuss what the problem was asking for and if students responded to every step. Remind students to diagram the question. Assist students to think through solutions for steps that are challenging. Provide practice with direct guidance that assists students to understand numerous strategies for every step.

5. Ask a variety of questions about a single situation, forcing students to make sense of questions & not just pick out numbers & perform some operation when they see a word problem.

ANALYZING STANDARDS-BASED ASSESSMENT RESULTS TO MAKE INSTRUCTIONAL & PROGRAMMATIC DECISIONS

The following Individual Student's Report can be analyzed to make data-driven recommendations for instructional interventions:

Language Arts Literacy - Total score of 135 - Partially Proficient.

Content Clusters

- Writing Score - 9 out of 24, with a "Just Proficient Mean" of 16;
- Reading Score - 13 out of 26, with a "Just Proficient Mean" of 17;

Knowledge & Skills

- Working with Text score - 6 out of 13, with a "Just Proficient Mean" of 9;
- Analyzing Text score - 8 out of 13, with a "Just Proficient Mean" of 9

Mathematics - Total score of 195 - Partially Proficient.

Content Clusters

- Number Sense, Operations, & Properties score- 6 out of 11, with a "Just Proficient Mean" of 8;
- Spatial Sense & Geometry score- 7 out of 9, with a "Just Proficient Mean" of 6;
- Data Analysis, Probability, & Discrete Mathematics score - 3 out of 8, with a "Just Mean Score" of 4; and
- Patterns & Algebra score - 3 out of 8, with a "Just Mean Score" of 6.

Knowledge & Skills

- Knowledge score - 6 out of 9, with a "Just Mean Score" of 7; and
- Problem Solving Skills score - 17 out of 34, with a "Just Mean Score" of 28.

math contents and skills (e.g. number sense, operations & properties; data analysis, probability & discrete mathematics; and patterns & algebra.

Based on the above analysis, and assuming other data for this student (e.g. classwork, homework, cumulative record, etc.) is consistent, the teacher may decide to provide the student with individual assistance in the test areas identified as weakness and/or reach out to the parent for assistance at home. The teacher may also refer the student to the code-mandated school-based intervention team, tutoring during/after school, and/or evaluations (Section 504 or Child Study Team).

HOW NJDOE REPORTS CAN BE UTILIZED TO IMPROVE TEACHING & LEARNING

Whether the test is NJ ASK, GEPA, or HSPA the various subjects are reported as scale scores that range from 100 to 300, and help identify various proficiency levels of our students in each assessed subject. If the student is in the "Advanced Proficient" or "Proficient" level, he/she has met the state standards for that content area. On the other hand, scores in the "Partially Proficient" level mean that the student has not met the state's minimum level of proficiency. These students may need additional support, which could be in the form of individual instructional or programmatic intervention.

Each subject (Language Arts Literacy, Math & Science - only in GEPA) has its own section of the test, which has a total score and subtotals for all the clusters of skills.

Example of Individual Analysis

As the above sample Individual Student Report highlights:

1. The student failed to achieve proficiency in mathematics (Partially Proficient) and Language Arts Literacy (Partially Proficient).
2. In Language Arts Literacy, the student only achieved "Partially Proficient", which means that he/she did not meet the state standards in Language Arts Literacy. A further analysis indicates that this student seems to experience weaknesses in all content clusters (Writing & Reading) and skills (working with text & analyzing text). Clearly, this student will need a good deal of assistance in Language Arts Literacy, in all content clusters and skills.
3. Mathematics - In the Mathematics section, the student's overall score was "Partially Proficient", indicating that he/she failed to meet the state standards. However, possible strengths were noted in the Content Cluster of Spatial Sense and Geometry. This student may need a good deal of assistance in a number of

Group Analysis

Teachers and administrators need to group and analyze student profiles to make instructional &/or programmatic decisions and interventions for classes, grades, schools, & NCLB-mandated disaggregated student subgroups:

1. An entire class with this profile

- a. The teacher clearly has to emphasize the Language Arts Literacy & Mathematics contents and skills in the district's curriculum, utilizing scientifically-based instructional strategies.
- b. The School Leadership Council (SLC) &/or principal may want to provide for smaller classes for these subjects &/or a good deal of individual & small group tutoring, which this data could justify on their school-based budget and needs assessment.
- c. One would hope that the school-based administration would also make a monumental effort to reach out to these students' parents and provide them with the knowledge and skills they need to

ANALYZING STANDARDS-BASED ASSESSMENT RESULTS TO MAKE INSTRUCTIONAL & PROGRAMMATIC DECISIONS

help their children improve their language arts literacy and mathematics skills.

d. Assistance may be requested from the central office in providing model lessons &/or additional instructional materials to better meet the specific language arts literacy and mathematics needs of this class.

e. One would also hope that central office administration would question the school-based decision making, which put together this class, especially if they didn't allocate the necessary resources.

2. School-wide profile for an entire grade

a. The principal &/or SLC, may wish to revisit the curriculum and instructional materials, staff development activities, programs and school-based resources allocated to Language Arts Literacy and Mathematics for this grade and the previous grade. They may also want to provide for smaller classes in this grade and the previous grade, with a good deal of individual/small group tutoring, which this data would justify on their school-based budget and a needs assessment.

b. Assistance may be requested from the central office in providing model lessons &/or additional instructional materials to better meet the specific language arts literacy and mathematics needs of this grade and the previous grade.

c. The school-based administration should make a monumental effort to reach out to the parents of this grade/previous grade and provide them with the knowledge and skills they need to help their children improve their language arts literacy and mathematics skills.

d. One would also hope that central

office would be helping to further analyze this data and offer further educational interventions.

3. District-wide profile for an entire grade

Central office may need to change priorities for curriculum, staff development, resource allocations, programs, administrative selection and/or supervision to address the needs of these students and students in the previous grade.

Where do we find the above data?

Most of the above data are available on "Student Rosters", "School Summaries" and "District Summaries".

a. This data should enable teachers, SLCs, school-based and central office administrators to better analyze results, plan for, and intervene to more effectively to meet the needs of our students.

b. Clearly, selective staff development should be a priority for respective staff in analyzing and using test data.

c. In addition, districts and the state need to further analyze mandated disaggregated groups of students results on all assessed contents, skills and test formats. They need to better report out strengths & weaknesses in a user-friendly way for students, parents, teachers and school-based administrators so they can utilize this objective data to determine whether/which instructional and programmatic interventions are required.

THE FACT THAT THESE ASSESSMENTS ARE NOT EVEN ADMINISTERED ONCE A YEAR AND THAT THE RESULTS ARE NOT PROVIDED IN A TIMELY WAY, LIMITS THEIR USEFULNESS. THE FOLLOWING SECTION DEMONSTRATES HOW TO CONTINUOUSLY ASSESS & MONITORING STUDENT PROGRESS!

SPECIAL EDUCATION & LEP STUDENTS

In the past, special education and Limited English Proficient (LEP) students were frequently exempt from statewide standardized assessments, or, if they were given the tests, their scores were separated out from the rest of a school's/district's scores when determining the success/failure of the school's/district's students. In the No Child Left Behind Act, the mandated statewide assessments must be given to virtually all students, although accommodations may be provided to LEP and special education students. In addition to the school/district wide progress in achieving adequate yearly progress (AYP), each of these subgroups must also meet the same adequate yearly progress (AYP) benchmarks. Therefore, analysis and data-driven intervention decisions are required for each of these disaggregated groups of students.

Based on the above considerations, districts, schools, and teachers must ensure that LEP and special education students are instructed in the regular education curriculum, with all the supports they need. In addition, since virtually all these students will be required to take the State's mandated standards-based assessments, district and school-based administrators will now also be judged by the success of these students. Therefore, districts, school-based administrators, and teachers must ensure that these students are provided with their legally-mandated test accommodations. For example, a special education student &/or a student with a disability under Section 504, may be eligible for testing accommodations, such as having all directions read to him. This student may be entitled to an untimed test, frequent breaks, reminders to focus on the test and an individually administered assessment. The student may also be entitled to have all sections (e.g. science, mathematics and writing) read to him, with the exception of reading comprehension. The student may be entitled to verbally respond to all questions/tasks (mathematics, science and reading comprehension), with the exception of the writing section of the Language Arts Literacy section. We need to ensure that these students are provided with their entitled test accommodations to maximize their own successes and the success of our schools and district.

ADMINISTRATORS AND TEACHERS NEED TO CONTINUOUSLY ASSESS AND MONITOR STUDENTS' PROGRESS

Research demonstrates that ongoing monitoring of student performance is required to make instructional and programmatic adjustments for individual and groups of students. Utilizing assessments with the same format and content as the standards-based assessments provides continuous opportunities for:

1. Students to utilize the knowledge and skills assessed on the State's tests;
2. Teachers to reinforce the students' strengths, as well as correct misunderstandings by adjusting instructional activities; and
3. Administrators to identify & intervene with low performing schools, grades, & disaggregated student subgroups, as well as content areas causing problems.

PRE-ASSESS SKILLS

The best way to gauge students' readiness on the concepts and skills presented on the State Tests would be to view previous standards-based assessment results. However, in New Jersey these assessments are not given every year and even if they were the turn around time to get these test results and the utility of these results are limited because they are not reported in a user-friendly fashion.

Therefore, teachers may have to administer one of the state's sample tests or a teacher made assessment that reflects the format, knowledge, and skills on the state tests. The results could then be:

1. Recorded to establish base-line data on student performance;
2. Analyzed to identify weaknesses;

and;

3. Utilized to implement instructional and programmatic strategies that address individual and groups of students' strengths and weaknesses.

This pre-assessment would also provide students with an overview of the test format and an understanding of the subsequent instructional and programmatic interventions that will be developed to better prepare students for the content and format of standards-based assessments.

ON-GOING ASSESSMENTS & MONITORING STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE CAN TAKE A NUMBER OF VENUES:

a. The District Must Lead

The district should regularly monitor school and student performance by utilizing benchmark assessments of academic objectives to supplement the state's standards-based assessments. Data from these assessments provide ongoing information about the gap between students' current performance levels and the desired performance levels at that grade level. Monitoring remains more frequent and intervention more intense until that gap is closed.

These assessments should:

- Occur at regularly scheduled times that is known to all;
- Be implemented in a way that faculty knows how the results will be shared and acted on, so the faculty views them as support and not as "got you" traps.
- Include a feedback loop at the district and school level to ensure data on student performance are reviewed and that appropriate action is taken.

- Ensure assessment data is continually disaggregated to study performance by school, grade, subject, all NCLB-mandated disaggregated student subgroups, or any other grouping that may be significant to the district.

- Report data in a user-friendly manner so teachers and district leaders can readily adjust the curriculum and instructional program on an ongoing basis. In this endeavor, the district should have specially trained staff to help school-based staff interpret and act upon the assessment results.

Based on information derived through screening and diagnostic assessments, children who are below-grade level:

1. Must be provided with instruction using programs and resources that have been validated and are appropriate for their achievement level;
2. Receive extra instructional time so that accelerated progress is possible; and
3. Have interventions monitored.

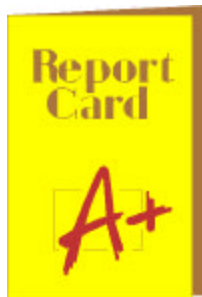
Subsequent assessments can then track progress on each identified skill and make further instructional and programmatic adjustments for individual and groups of students.

Teachers and administrators should maintain running records of student performance on a regular schedule. This can be accomplished by writing information regarding individual student's specific needs, as it pertains to each cluster assessed on the standards-based assessments. Administrators can then accumulate and collate this information for various groupings of stu-

ADMINISTRATORS AND TEACHERS NEED TO CONTINUOUSLY ASSESS AND MONITOR STUDENTS' PROGRESS

dents (e.g. class, grade, subject, school, district, etc.) Over a period of months, patterns and insights for individualized instruction and programmatic intervention emerge. Subsequent program adjustments may then involve additional &/or more focused resources at a grade, content, school, &/or classroom level.

District report cards may serve as a perfect venue for this type of ongoing assessment and monitoring. However, they need to be changed to ensure they are aligned with the skills & content necessary to succeed on standards-based assessments. Districts may consider setting up report cards, based on the CCCS for each subject and the corresponding rubrics. In addition, these report cards could utilize the Cumulative Progress Indicators for each subject, based on the grade and subject.

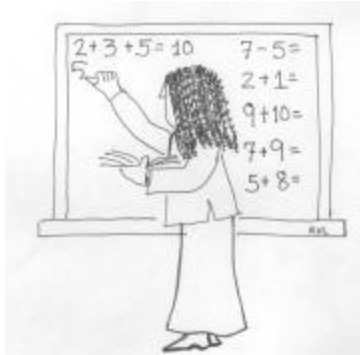


b. Teacher administered & corrected assessments

- Every lesson should have an evaluative piece. Whether, it's based on oral responding, seatwork, or home work, the teacher needs to evaluate the student's knowledge and skills.
- When performance levels indicate learning needs at a specific student level, the teacher intervenes and/or adjusts immediately.

c. Students self- assessments

Students can self assess and monitor their own progress on the knowledge & skills outlined in the state test specifications (see author's self-reporting form); and



Art by Rose La Forte,
13th Ave School

Students can work in various groupings to present solutions and to evaluate peer performance; (see Rubrics, Curriculum-Based Assessments, and Author's Self-Reporting Form).

d. Curriculum Based Assessment (CBA)

Curriculum-based assessments can assist teachers in continuously monitoring student academic progress. Research demonstrates that CBA is a powerful assessment tool for monitoring short-term and long-term progress, as well as increasing performance (speed & accuracy) in selected academic areas.

In the process, the student is given brief, timed exercises, or probes, to complete, using materials drawn directly from the child's curriculum. These CBA probes are given under standardized conditions (e.g. same directions, timed - may last from 1 to 5 minutes),

and the student's performance is scored for speed & accuracy. Since CBA probes are quick to administer and simple to score, they can be given repeatedly, and chartered, to provide the teacher, student, and parent a visual record of a targeted child's rate of progress.

Research-based CBA procedures and norms for accuracy and fluency have been developed for monitoring basic skills in the content areas covered by New Jersey's standards-based assessments - mathematics, reading, writing, and spelling. They help identify each student's level of frustration, instruction, and mastery that can be utilized to develop, implement, and monitor interventions.

CBA's are also beneficial because:

- Student performance is scored for speed & accuracy, criteria that are critical on the state's tests;
- They enable teachers to be more realistic when judging students' progress in the curriculum; and
- They enable teachers to identify problems, as well as plan & monitor the effectiveness of interventions.

**THE NTU HAS PRODUCED A
MUCH MORE DETAILED
RESOURCE GUIDE ON HOW TO
UTILIZE THIS RESEARCH-
BASED STRATEGY TO IMPROVE
TEACHING AND LEARNING.**

Copies of NJDOE assessments and sample questions, as well as a resource guide on how to utilize curriculum-based assessments to improve teaching & learning, can be accessed electronically by e-mailing the ntu (mm@ntuaft.com), or visiting the web pages of the ntu (<http://www.ntuaft.com>), the nps (<http://www.nps.k12.nj.us>) or in print by visiting NTU's education resource center.

ADMINISTRATIVE LEADERSHIP IS CRITICAL TO MAXIMIZING PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN PREPARING STUDENTS FOR THE STANDARDS-BASED TESTS

As this document has highlighted, there is a large array of valuable resources that parents and students can access and utilize to ensure that students perform at their personal best on the standards-based assessments.

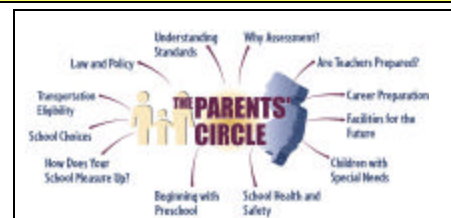
Schools & districts can also provide parents with training and support to help their children maximize performance on standards-based assessments:

a. Send letter home to parents (see sample letter on this page) and provide meetings/workshops on test requirements and rubrics. Most of this information and resources are contained and ref-

erenced in this publication. If parents don't respond to the written invitations, contact them to establish other venues to share format and content of standards-based assessments (written communications, e-mail, telephone calls, web page resources, etc.).

b. Assure that EVERY STUDENT has eaten a healthy breakfast (complex carbohydrates and protein);

The New Jersey Department of Education has an array of resources for parents that can be utilized:
<http://www.state.nj.us/njded/parents/>



PARENTAL ACTIVITIES SHOULD ALSO TRY TO FOSTER A HOME ENVIRONMENT THAT IMPROVES STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Research demonstrates that a student's "home atmosphere" has a higher correlation with student achievement than any of the other family characteristics associated with Socio-Economic-Status (SES), such as family income, occupation of the principal "bread-winner", parents' education, or any combination of these characteristics. And unlike SES, home atmosphere is more amenable to school-based interventions.

A home atmosphere that correlates positively with student achievement is composed of the following school-related characteristics that schools & districts should foster through various communications, policies, & workshops:

- 1. Communication about school** - Parents interest in and communication about their child's school work and includes:
 - a. frequent and systematic discussion(s) with their child regarding school work;
 - b. encouraging their child regarding school work; and
 - c. providing resources to help their children do school work.
- 2. Supervision** - This generally refers to the extent to which parents monitor and control their children's behavior to optimize academic achievement and includes monitoring time spent doing homework, watching television, other after school activities; and
- 3. Parental expectations** - This generally involves expressing high academic expectations for their children.

Dear Parents,

For better, or worse, tests are an integral part of our society that help determine:

1. If your child succeeds or fails in school, as well as whether they get into a particular post-secondary school, &/or the right job;
2. If your child can utilize information they learn to solve challenging problems.
3. Whether someone is qualified to be your child's teacher, administrator, or teacher aide;
4. If your child's school/district succeeds &/or fails in ensuring that students learn what is being taught.

You are an integral part in ensuring that your child learns in school and can demonstrate this knowledge on New Jersey's mandated standards-based assessments. The standards for each grade and each subject, on which these assessments are based, are called the Core Curriculum Content Standards (CCCS). A copy of these CCCSs for your child's grade is included in this letter (see exhibit A). The objective of this year's curriculum, classroom instruction, homework, and projects will be to ensure that your child these goals.

The success of the school's instructional activities and your child's learning will be largely judged by your child's classroom/subject grades. Many of your child's classroom & homework assignments, school projects, and classroom/school/district tests will attempt to utilize the same format and content that's found on the standards-based assessments. This will familiarize your child with what to expect on these standards-based assessments, as well as providing them with multiple opportunities to practice those skills and content areas that will be tested.

To help familiarize you with the content and format of these tests, as well as much of your child's work that his/her teacher will be sending home regularly, we are planning a series of parent workshops. Not only will these activities keep you informed about what is expected of your child to succeed on these standards-based assessments, but, hopefully you will be able to assist your child in mastering the skills and subject matter. We will provide you with activities to reinforce expectations, as well as the understanding you will need to understand many of your child's grades.

Please let us know the day(s) and hour(s) you could attend these workshops on the attached form. Your active involvement is critical to your child's success in school; therefore, we will do all we can to accommodate your desired schedule, as well as language/learning needs. Your active participation also reinforces the message to your child that the schoolwork and standards-based assessments are important and he/she will be prepared to perform at their personal best.

Respectfully,

School Principal

ADMINISTRATIVE LEADERSHIP IS CRITICAL TO ENSURE STAFF HAVE THE KNOWLEDGE & SKILLS THEY NEED TO ENSURE STUDENTS PERFORM AT THEIR PERSONAL BEST ON THE STANDARDS-BASED ASSESSMENTS

Staff development is critical to ensure that accessing, developing, & utilizing resources improves teaching & learning and subsequent students' performance on standards-based assessments. These staff development activities should focus on:

1. THE CORE CURRICULUM CONTENT STANDARDS



Art by Rose La Forte,
13th Ave School

a. It's critical that school-based administrative & instructional staff are thoroughly familiar with the corresponding CCCS and how to structure instructional and programmatic activities for each grade and subject they are responsible for (e.g. language arts literacy, math, and science)

b. Ensure that special education and LEP students are instructed in the CCCSs and are provided with all necessary curriculum modifications & test accommodations.

2. THE STANDARDS-BASED ASSESSMENTS - STAFF DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES NEED TO ENSURE THAT STAFF KNOWS HOW TO:

a. Incorporate the content and format of the standards-based assessments into every-day instructional activities (e.g. lesson plans, class work, homework, projects, etc.);

b. Teach research-based test-taking skills that are effective in improving student performances on tests like New Jersey's standards-based assessments;

c. Develop and implement lesson plans that teach and reinforce the content and skills needed for respective standards-based assessments;

d. Motivate students to engage in classroom and homework activities focused on test-taking skills and performing at their personal best.

e. Introduce, utilize, and reinforce the accurate implementation of the respective scoring rubrics;

f. Create their own tests using the same format (e.g. open-ended and multiple choice questions) as the State's standards-based assessments.

g. Utilize Individual Student Profiles (ISP), as well as other NJDOE reports to improve teaching and learning. These activities should provide hands-on-experiences in analyzing, interpreting, and making instructional decisions for individual and groups of students; and

h. Involve parents in many of the above activities to assist their respective children in developing the skills and knowledge they need to perform at their personal best on the standards-based assessments. (See the preceding page for more details).

RESEARCH DEMONSTRATES THAT IN ORDER TO BE MOST EFFECTIVE, THESE STAFF DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES SHOULD:

1. Be regularly scheduled and practice oriented in grade-level and content area meetings.

2. Focus on content knowledge - specific strategies for specific subject areas. Pedagogical knowledge must be presented to teachers in the context of their specific subject area;

3. Provide opportunities for active learning - teachers apply the pedagogical knowledge they learn;

4. Provide an overall coherence, where each activity builds on others. For example, the Newark Public Schools' professional development plan identifies data-based decision-making as the coherent theme; and

5. Provide follow up activities that ensures previously learned knowledge and skills are reinforced and implemented in the classroom.



Mitchel Gerry
NTU Editor
& Watchdog

THE WATCHDOG ON NEW JERSEY'S STANDARDS-BASED ASSESSMENTS



The New Jersey Department of Education has been in the forefront of developing and providing a number of resources for educators, students, and parents that, if properly utilized, can help students optimize performance on the standards-based assessments.

Unfortunately, there are a number of significant problems that impede this from happening:

1. The length of time between students taking the standards-based assessments and the reporting out of these results is excessive and interferes with instructional and programmatic planning and intervention. By the time the districts have received detailed information back from the state, the students have already moved on to the next grade level;
2. Students' test score information from the state comes back in an ASCII format. Unfortunately, in most cases, districts don't have the manpower or training to properly input, analyze, and covert information into a more useable database format.
3. The Individual Student Reports (ISR) can be invaluable for teachers in making data-driven instructional decisions; however the ISR doesn't:

- a. Identify separate student scores for open-ended and multiple choice questions,
- b. Differentiate assessed knowledge from skills. Therefore, we can't plan instructional & programmatic interventions to address these specific weaknesses in knowledge and skills in respective content areas.

The following suggestions may help address these identified problems:

1. The NJDOE's contract with the test developer needs to ensure:
 - a. A much quicker turn around time after the assessments are given; and

- b. the test data is reported in a more user-friendly format for the NJDOE, districts, schools, educators and parents to develop and implement more data driven interventions;
2. The NJDOE needs to move more expeditiously on developing the NJ SMART student data base and ensure that it provides user-friendly information for schools, districts, and teachers to make instructional and programmatic decisions.
3. District and school-based administrators need to ensure that student test data is available expeditiously and in a user-friendly format so teachers can make data-based instructional and programmatic decisions.
4. District and school-based administrators must ensure that teachers are provided with current and previous year's student test data, highlighting strengths and weaknesses, with subsequent research-based instructional and programmatic recommendations; and
5. District and school-based administrators must ensure that teachers are provided with standards-based assessments, aligned with New Jersey's content and format, to be administered regularly throughout the year in the various CCCS.

Statewide problems in math

Given the significant problems students are experiencing with mathematics standards-based assessments throughout the country, including New Jersey, perhaps we need to investigate:

1. Are the standards-based assessments in math, carefully aligned with the CCCS?
2. Do New Jersey's Frameworks for math adequately address the CCCS?
3. Do district's instructional and programmatic strategies for math adequately address the teaching & learning of the CCCS? and
4. Much more research is needed to develop effective instructional and programmatic strategies that improve students' math achievement.

Statewide problems with special education and LEP students

1. Are special education and LEP students being instructed in the LAL & Math CCCS? If not, what are the impediments and what can be done to address them?
2. Do New Jersey's Frameworks adequately address the curriculum & programmatic needs (e.g. accommodations, modifications, etc.) of special education & LEP students? If so, are they widely utilized?
3. Do New Jersey's allowable test accommodations adequately address the needs of LEP & special education student? and
4. Expecting all special education & LEP students to become proficient may not be a realistic goal.



Inconsistent Accountability Systems

The new Abbott Regulations only count general education students' language arts literacy scores in the fourth grade; thereby ignoring NCLB-mandated student performance in mathematics, middle and high schools, as well as special education and LEP students. Research demonstrates that this type of inconsistent accountability system interferes with student achievement. In addition, by specifically excluding special education and LEP students, these regulations may very well violate the civil rights of protected groups (e.g. disability & national origin).

PRINCIPALS CONTROL EACH SCHOOL'S RESOURCES. THEREFORE, THE NTU RECOMMENDS UTILIZING THE RESEARCH-BASED CRITERIA ON THE FOLLOWING PAGE TO EVALUATE PRINCIPALS

A META-ANALYSIS OF 30-YEARS OF RESEARCH IDENTIFIED THE FOLLOWING 21 LEADERSHIP RESPONSIBILITIES THAT ARE SIGNIFICANTLY ASSOCIATED WITH STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT:

RESOURCES	Provides teachers with materials and professional development necessary for the successful execution of their jobs.
INPUT	Involves teachers in the design & implementation of important decisions & policies.
DISCIPLINE	Protects teachers from issues & influences that would detract from their teaching time or focus.
COMMUNICATION	Establishes strong lines of communication with teachers & among students.
FLEXIBILITY	Adapts leadership behavior to the needs of the current situation & is comfortable with dissent.
RELATIONSHIP	Demonstrates an awareness of the personal aspects of teachers & staff
VISIBILITY	Has quality contact & interaction with teachers & students.
CONTINGENT REWARDS	Recognizes & rewards individual accomplishments
ORDER	Establishes a set of standard operating procedures & routines.
AFFIRMATION	Recognizes & celebrates school accomplishments & acknowledges failures.
OPTIMIZER	Inspires & leads new & challenging innovations.
INTELLECTUAL STIMULATION	Ensures that faculty & staff are aware of the most current theories and practices & makes the discussion of these a regular aspect of the school's culture.
FOCUS	Establishes clear goals & keeps those goals in the forefront of the school's attention.
CHANGE AGENT	Is willing to & actively challenges the status quo.
SITUATIONAL AWARENESS	Is aware of the details and undercurrents in the running of the school & uses this information to address current and potential problems.
OUTREACH	Is an advocate and spokesperson for the school to all stakeholders.
IDEALS/BELIEFS	Communicates & operates from strong ideals & beliefs about schooling.
CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION, ASSESSMENT	Is directly involved in the design & implementation of curriculum, instruction, & assessment practices.
MONITORS/EVALUATES	Monitors the effectiveness of school practices & their impact on student learning.
CULTURE	Fosters shared beliefs & a sense of community & cooperation.
KNOWLEDGE OF CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION ASSESSMENT	Is knowledgeable about current curriculum, instruction, & assessment practices.

THE NTU BELIEVES THAT PRINCIPALS SHOULD BE EVALUATED BY THEIR ABILITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ABOVE STRATEGIES SINCE RESEARCH DEMONSTRATES THEY CORRELATE WITH IMPROVED STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT!

(RESEARCH CITED COMES FROM McREL'S WORKING PAPER "BALANCED LEADERSHIP: WHAT 30 YEARS OF RESEARCH TELLS US ABOUT THE EFFECT OF LEADERSHIP ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT - TO VIEW RESEARCH GO TO <http://www.mcrel.org>)

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**ARE YOU
IN OVER
YOUR
HEAD?**

**THIS NTU
RESOURCE
CAN KEEP
YOU
AFLOAT!**

WHICH STAKEHOLDERS ARE THROWING ANCHORS INSTEAD OF LIFE-JACKETS?



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