



State of New Jersey

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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June 23, 2015

TO: Chief School Administrators
School Leaders

ROUTE TO: All District Principals, Assistant/Vice Principals, and Teaching Staff Members

FROM: Peter Shulman, Assistant Commissioner/Chief Talent Officer *PS*
Division of Teacher and Leader Effectiveness

SUBJECT: AchieveNJ Update

IN THIS MEMO:

I. Summer Data Submissions

II. Updated SGO Resources for 2015-16

III. Options for District Flexibility and Innovation with AchieveNJ

This memo provides information about summer evaluation data collections, refreshed resources on Student Growth Objectives (SGOs) for 2015-16, and various options for districts considering unique approaches to aspects of the evaluation system. Please visit the [AchieveNJ Website](#) for all evaluation resources and send any questions and feedback to educatorevaluation@doe.state.nj.us.

I. Summer Data Collections

This summer, districts will submit evaluation-related data through two collections. Please be sure you are working with the appropriate individuals in your district to complete these processes.

1. The **Course Roster Submission** – which districts have engaged in since 2011 – will take place between July 6 and August 3, 2015. NJ SMART is now conducting a practice submission window for districts, which ends on June 30. As indicated in several previous communications, the quality of the median Student Growth Percentile (mSGP) measure of evaluation relies entirely on the accuracy of district roster information. We strongly encourage all districts to verify rosters with educators and to participate in the practice window to ensure your

submission meets the appropriate technical quality when the official window opens in July. Please see this previously-released [Course Roster Verification and Submission](#) guidance for more information.

2. The **Staff Evaluation Submission** will also occur in July to capture the multiple measures of educator practice and student growth that are aligned to AchieveNJ. The practice window and submission occur as follows:
 - **April 20, 2015:** Practice Staff Evaluation Submission Opened at 8 AM EST.
As always, districts are strongly encouraged to participate in the practice submission window to properly cleanse the final file.
 - **June 30, 2015:** Practice Staff Evaluation Submission Closes at 5 PM EST.
 - **July 6, 2015:** Official Staff Evaluation Submission Opens at 8 AM EST.
Districts may submit the final file on the first day of the official period – a best practice to avoid any last-minute rush or risk of missing the firm deadline.
 - **August 3, 2015:** Official Staff Evaluation Submission Closes at 5 PM EST.
No extensions will be granted by the Department.

For more information about these and all other NJ SMART submissions, please visit <http://www.state.nj.us/education/njsmart/>.

II. Updated SGO Resources for 2015-16

Updated Guidebook and Other Resources

State SGO *requirements* are the same for 2015-16. Working closely with educators, the Department has improved *guidance and best practices* based on educator feedback over the past several years. “SGO 2.1” is an update to SGO 2.0, the Department’s guidance and workshops for the 2014-15 school year. In this set of materials, we encourage educators to continue to focus on how SGOs can most positively impact teacher practice and ultimately student achievement.

Our updated [SGO 2.1 Guidebook](#) includes recommendations to improve the development process and value of SGOs by focusing on the following four themes:

1. **Assessments** must be accurate and useful measures of student learning.
 - Increasing the quality of assessments given is critical in producing high quality SGOs. Building on this work, we are providing a series of “[Assessment Design Modules](#)” to assist educators in their continued efforts to develop and choose high quality assessments. The Department has partnered with the United States Department of Education in the development of these modules, which include input from educators from across the state of New Jersey.
2. Student learning can be improved by using **SGOs as a tool to enhance and inform teaching**.
3. Using a **flexible and innovative approach** to SGOs can increase their quality and value for teachers and students.
4. **Collaboration with colleagues** is a critical component of both the SGO process and helping students achieve the goals their teachers set for them.

- The Department has worked with various school districts in creating a “Collaborative Team Toolkit.” This series of tools is designed to help educators utilize collaborative teams in improving the SGO process and will be released by late July.

SGO 2.1 Summer Workshops

As announced last month, the Office of Evaluation is hosting a new series of free “SGO 2.1” workshops continuing through September. Please visit the [event registration page](#) for more information, as new dates in the northern region of the state have been recently added. As in previous years, these regional workshops will be open to teams of up to five SGO implementation administrators and teachers, with the intention that these leaders will take the information back to their districts. Districts who wish to bring more than five participants to these workshops should contact us at educatorevaluation@doe.state.nj.us.

In addition, expanded SGO examples and other resources will be posted on our website in the coming months.

III. Options for District Flexibility and Innovation with AchieveNJ

As we enter the third year of AchieveNJ, most districts have successfully shifted their focus from the logistics of compliance to their efforts to continually improve the accuracy and value of professional feedback to educators. As the Office of Evaluation team has worked with educators in schools and districts across the state, we have listened to concerns and suggestions related to some of the state requirements for evaluation that might be causing unnecessary restrictions. In response, we have developed a process to help districts:

- Learn about areas of flexibility within the AchieveNJ framework; and
- Provide support and guidance to districts who wish to modify evaluation processes to foster improvements at the local level.

Options for Making Local Changes to AchieveNJ

Districts may consider the following avenues for adjusting their evaluation systems to best meet local needs. Each of the listed options below has the potential to improve AchieveNJ at a local level either by providing educators with enhanced feedback or by freeing up time for evaluators to focus on the quality and accuracy of the system:

1. Not surprisingly, as a response to educators’ requests, many district leaders have already adapted AchieveNJ to implement **more than the minimum requirements** of the system. These options are open to all districts across the state; for example:
 - Observe a classroom teacher for more than the minimum 20 or 40 minutes required.
 - Provide teams of teachers time and guidance to conduct non-evaluative instructional rounds and/or peer coaching.
2. Many districts have taken deep ownership over the evaluation process, **modifying the evaluation system within the confines of the requirements** to better meet unique district needs. Districts have involved their District Evaluation Advisory Committees (DEACs), staff

representatives, and professional associations when making these improvements. Such options are open to all districts for consideration; for example:

- Use differential weighting of domains within the educator practice instrument to emphasize areas of practice the district considers most critical.
 - Encourage groups of teachers and supervisors to set similar SGOs based on common standards and assessments for a given grade or subject.
 - Streamline vendor-provided data collection and reporting systems to meet local needs.
 - Use video to augment the observation process.
3. While local implementation choices described above can improve overall quality of the system within existing regulations, there are certain modifications that may not be possible according to AchieveNJ's rules. Additionally, in some rare cases, districts face certain logistical challenges that make adoption of certain evaluation procedures extremely challenging. In these cases, districts may, through an application for a **State-approved Equivalency or Waiver**, propose a plan that meets the spirit and intention of the regulations without diminishing the quality of the evaluation; for example:
- Use an alternative evaluation protocol for Highly Effective teachers to provide more appropriate professional learning opportunities.
 - Replace one observation with multiple walkthrough evaluations to increase opportunities for feedback to teachers.

Process for Communicating with the Department

The Office of Evaluation has designated our Innovation Manager, Anthony Fitzpatrick, to work directly with districts who wish to explore the options listed above. We are asking districts to first complete [this form](#) to provide as much detail as possible about the changes that you wish to make and your contact information. Anthony will contact you promptly to help identify your next step in modifying the evaluation framework to best meet the needs of your district while ensuring your plan will lead to accurate and useful evaluations for all educators.

We will review submitted proposals on an ongoing basis but encourage districts to complete this form by July 31, 2015 for changes for the 2015-16 school year.

Thank you for your dedication to improving evaluations in New Jersey. Have a wonderful summer.

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c: Members, State Board of Education
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Executive County Superintendents
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