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September 9, 2015

TO: Chief School Administrators
Charter School and Renaissance School Project Lead Persons
High School Principals and Supervisors
School Counselors

FROM: David C. Hespe
Commissioner

RE: Exemption from PARCC ELA 11

The New Jersey Department of Education (Department) continually strives to find ways to reduce the testing burden on students and schools while not negatively impacting the effectiveness of our statewide assessment program. I am pleased to share with you an additional way that we will be doing that. As you know, the PARCC consortium adopted the performance levels of 4 and 5 in the English Language Arts Grade 11 (ELA11) assessment as its College and Career Readiness benchmark. Postsecondary institutions across the nation have agreed that students who reach that benchmark can be exempted from taking additional college placement exams, such as Accuplacer, and be placed directly into credit bearing coursework. However, many of New Jersey's students are already demonstrating their college readiness by participating in validated assessments that postsecondary institutions use to place students in even higher levels of coursework. For example, in 2014-2015, more than eight thousand New Jersey students achieved a score of three or higher on the Advanced Placement English Language and Composition assessment. Based on discussions with stakeholders and members of the Study Commission on the Use of Statewide Assessments, we are now offering school districts the opportunity to exempt students from participating in the PARCC ELA11 if they participate in another validated assessment program designed to be used nationwide by postsecondary institutions for placement in their course sequences. Examples of such assessments include Advanced Placement (AP) English Language and Composition, AP English Literature and Composition, and International Baccalaureate (IB) English.

To be eligible for the exemption, students must take the validated assessment during their eleventh grade school year.

The decision to grant exemptions from PARCC ELA11 has two important implications. First, for purposes of school accountability under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the Department will only use data from the 2014-2015 administrations of ELA9 and ELA10 in formulating the baseline for progress targets under its ESEA flexibility waiver. Accordingly, the school's ESEA participation rate in ELA assessments will also only be calculated using data from the ELA9 and ELA10 assessments. Second, student performance data from ELA11, and any of the other validated assessment programs, will be included on the school's performance report, broken down into score categories with a count of total testers. In the upcoming months, the Department will work to ensure that adequate guidance about how to interpret PARCC results alongside the AP/IB results is developed.

DCH/BAE

c: Members, State Board of Education
Senior Staff
Jeffrey Hauger
Executive County Superintendents
Executive Directors for Regional Achievement Centers
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