

## Update on the use of PARCC as a graduation requirement

On August 3<sup>rd</sup>, the State Board of Education voted to approve the New Jersey Department of Education's proposal to make amend the state's graduation requirement regulations. The changes make PARCC the sole graduation exit exam as of the year 2021, which will impact the current year's 8<sup>th</sup> grade students. Until 2021, the current regulations remain in effect. While the current regulations remain controversial, they do at least maintain multiple options for an exit exam until the year 2020. The regulations that were just approved not only make PARCC the sole graduation requirement, they also require that students take all PARCC exams throughout their high school career in order to be eligible to access a portfolio option which will be the only alternative to PARCC.

Regulations are adopted to provide a framework with which to implement laws. As stated by the Education Law Center, "NJDOE's duty is to enact regulations that faithfully implement the laws the State Legislature has passed. The Department does not have the legal authority to impose policies that directly contradict the statute governing high school graduation."

New Jersey State statute calls for the graduation exit exam to be administered in 11<sup>th</sup> grade, and states that students must be provided with retesting opportunities. Despite this set of facts, the State BOE approved regulations that make PARCC Alg1, which is taken as early as 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and ELA10, which as the name implies is taken in 10<sup>th</sup> grade, the new exit exams.

Clearly, this does not comply with state law.

It is highly likely that the State Board's approval will be challenged in court. In addition, several legislators have spoken out against the regulations, including our own State Senator Patrick Diegnan. On August 10<sup>th</sup> I spoke at a press conference with Senator Diegnan, and he stated that the State Board's approval of the graduation requirement regulations was "[incomprehensible](#)".

In a written statement, Senator Nia Gill stated, "The action by the state board is extremely disappointing. Parents, teachers and students have expressed concerns about the PARCC exams and the multitude of challenges associated with them. In addition, the test scores reported this week demonstrate that the state is not prepared to implement the test as a graduation requirement."

[Preliminary statewide data](#) released just before the State Board vote showed that only 44% of students received the score required to graduate on the ELA10 exam, and only 41% received the score required on the Alg1 exam. The state did not release the percentage of students that passed BOTH exams, but it is likely that the number would be slightly lower still. This means that upwards of 60% of the state's students would be forced to create a portfolio in order to graduate, or be denied a

diploma. This will require tremendous amounts of time and resources at the district level, on top of the tremendous time and resources already wasted on administering the PARCC test.

Before the State Board voted, 27 districts adopted resolutions decrying the use of PARCC as a graduation requirement. And as I've reported at previous meetings, the New Jersey School Board Association's Delegate Assembly overwhelmingly adopted Highland Park's resolution that called for multiple paths to graduation.

That vote made it abundantly clear that the majority of school boards across the state are opposed to the Christie administration's use of PARCC as the sole graduation requirement in the state.

The State Board was made aware of this overwhelming opposition many times before they voted, but the Governor's influence is powerful, and seems to be something they simply can not overcome. This means that the decision will likely be overturned either in the courts, by the legislature, or by a new Governor. I will continue to keep the board and the community informed, and will be sure to provide updates if there is any further action we can take to hasten the demise of this ill-conceived policy.

I am very proud of the work this board has done to educate other boards across the state and to lead them to action. The fact that so many boards across the state raised their voices in opposition will hopefully ensure that no student is ever denied a diploma because he/she refused or did not score high enough on the PARCC.

As always, if anyone has any comments, questions or concerns, don't hesitate to reach out to me at [boedcimarusti@hpschools.net](mailto:boedcimarusti@hpschools.net).