

Esteemed members of the

Over the past two years, Statewide standardized assessment in New Jersey has been in a constant state of flux. The New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) and State Board of Education (SBOE) have renamed the PARCC assessment as the New Jersey Student Learning Assessment (NJSLA), however the test and its consequences for students, districts and educators are very much ever-present.

Parents, students, and educators across the state have continuously shared their voices, hopes, and perspectives on the future of assessment with legislators, SBOE members, and the NJDOE. Common concerns with the PARCC/NJSLA include the damaging impact high-stakes assessments have on student mental health, the immense amount of time PARCC/NJSLA testing and test-prep rob from true teaching and learning, and the extraordinary financial strain the assessments put on our state at a time when countless districts are dangerously underfunded.

The NJDOE currently has a proposal to reduce testing requirements at the high school level. However, the SBOE is looking to a legislative fix that allows for even more testing than the 63.5 hours of statewide standardized testing to which our students are subjected each year.

Enclosed you will find:

- **A Model School Board Resolution** that can be customized to fit your local context
- **Fact Check** on Statewide Assessment – FAQs to Common Misconceptions
- **PARCC/NJSLA Journey Maps** depicting the lived experiences of students, parents, and educators before, during, and after testing timeframes in a given school year
- Additional supporting resources

As the SBOE continually ignores parent, student, and educator cries for a solution, we look to local school boards to serve as leaders in this fight for our students. **We urge you to do the following by Mar. 31, 2020:**

1. **Consider the impact on your local community and to pass a board resolution.**
2. **Share your resolution with New Jersey state policymakers.**

We sincerely thank you for your voices, advocacy, and tireless commitment to the students, families, and educators of the state of New Jersey. Should you have any questions, please reach out to assessment@njea.org

In solidarity –

“My children are at stake.”

– Parent

“The PARCC may make it so that I don’t become as successful as others or go to a good college.”

– 4th grade student

“What’s at stake with PARCC? An utter feeling of despair among students who feel they have little academic worth because of this assessment.”

– High School Student

“Testing has got to change – the damage is to the community as well as the school.”

– Parent

Model School Board Resolutions

Resolution of the [Local District] Board of Education Concerning the Educational Impact of Statewide Standardized Assessment

WHEREAS, the over-reliance on high-stakes standardized testing in district, state and federal accountability systems is undermining educational quality and equity in U.S. public schools by hampering educators' efforts to focus on the broad range of learning experiences that promote the innovation, creativity, problem solving, collaboration, communication, critical thinking and deep subject-matter knowledge that will allow students to thrive in a democracy and an increasingly global society and economy; and

WHEREAS, the state of New Jersey spends more time on statewide standardized testing than any other state in the country, surrendering a minimum of 63.5 hours of instructional time to statewide standardized testing across grades three through eleven during the 2019-20 school year; and

WHEREAS, school districts throughout the U.S. are federally mandated to administer statewide standardized tests annually in math and English/ language arts across grades 3 through 8 and once in high school, and once in grades 3-5, 6-8, and high school for science; and

WHEREAS, school districts throughout New Jersey are mandated to go beyond the federal requirements by administering four additional statewide standardized assessments at the high school level and requiring students to pass an exit exam to graduate; and

WHEREAS, in addition to the standardized tests mandated under state and federal law, school districts throughout New Jersey also administer separate districtwide standardized tests throughout the year that increase the amount of time and preparation dedicated to annual standardized testing, tearing this time away from true teaching and learning; and

WHEREAS, the over-emphasis on standardized testing has caused considerable collateral damage in too many schools, including narrowing the curriculum, teaching to the test, negatively affecting student mental health, reducing love of learning, constraining instructional time, pushing students out of school, driving excellent teachers out of the profession, and undermining school climate; and

WHEREAS, high-stakes standardized testing and exit-exam requirements have negative effects for students across all grade levels, from all backgrounds, and especially for low-income students, English language learners, children of color, and those with disabilities; and

WHEREAS, New Jersey public schools are ranked No. 1 in the country, have one of the highest high school graduation rates, and highest rankings on the National Assessment of Educational Progress; and

WHEREAS, the National Bureau of Economics Research and research members of the American Educational Research Association have found that high school exit exams increase incarceration rates and have no influence on employment and wages; and

WHEREAS, results from empirical studies conducted in New Jersey have consistently demonstrated that student results on New Jersey statewide standardized assessments can be predicted by community and family census data ; and

WHEREAS, research by the College Board reveals that the high school grade-point average is a better indicator of first-year college success and later persistence through college than results of standardized assessments ; and

WHEREAS, increasing numbers of educational researchers, activists, parents, educators and school districts are continually voicing concerns about the over-emphasis and over-abundance of statewide standardized tests, resulting in states exploring alternative assessment models and the majority of states dropping the high school exit exam as a requirement for graduation from high school; and, therefore, be it

RESOLVED that the [insert local school board name] calls on the governor, New Jersey State Legislature, New Jersey State Board of Education, and New Jersey Department of Education, to reduce the volume of statewide standardized tests that students must take and to reduce the time educators and students spend on meaningless test preparation drills, and be it further

RESOLVED that the [insert local school board name] calls on the governor, New Jersey State Legislature, New Jersey State Board of Education, and New Jersey Department of Education, to formulate and pass legislation and policies whereby no more than a predetermined percentage of the school year should be spent on standardized assessments and assessment preparation drills, and be it further

RESOLVED that the [insert local school board name] calls on the governor, New Jersey State Legislature, New Jersey State Board of Education, and New Jersey Department of Education, to formulate and pass legislation and policies that rid that state of the antiquated and inequitable exit testing requirement, and be it further

RESOLVED that the [insert local school board name] calls on the governor, New Jersey State Legislature, New Jersey State Board of Education, and New Jersey Department of Education, to work with educators and other stakeholders to develop and adopt an authentic and innovative assessment system—akin to The New York Standards Performance Consortium or New Hampshire Performance Assessment of Competency Education—based on multiple forms of assessment that do not require extensive standardized testing, more accurately reflect the broad range of student learning, and is truly used to support students and improve schools, and be it further

RESOLVED that the [insert local school board name] commits to work with educators locally to reduce the volume of district determined standardized tests that students must take and to analyze and reduce the time educators and students spend on meaningless test preparation drills, accordingly, and be it further

RESOLVED that the [insert local school board name] shall promulgate any necessary policies, procedures and guidelines to implement this resolution, and hereby directs the board secretary to deliver this resolution to all members of the state legislature, all members of the State Board of Education, the board secretaries of each school district in the county, the County Office of Education, and the Office of the Commissioner of Education.

¹ Hout, M. & Elliot, S., eds. 2011. Incentives and Test-Based Accountability in Education. National Research Council. http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=12521

Dee, T.S. & Jacob, B.A. 2006. "Do High School Exit Exams Influence Educational Attainment or labor Market Performance?" Social Science Research Network, April. http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=900985

Baker, O., and Lang, K. 2013. "The Effect of High School Exit Exams on Graduation, Employment, Wages, and Incarceration," National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper No. 19182, June.

² Christopher H. Tienken, Anthony Colella, Christian Angelillo, Meredith Fox, Kevin R. McCahill & Adam Wolfe (2017) Predicting Middle Level State Standardized Test Results Using Family and Community Demographic Data, RMLE Online, 40:1, 1-13, DOI: 10.1080/19404476.2016.1252304

³ Bowen, W. G., Chingos, M. M., & McPherson, M. S. (2011). Crossing the finish line completing college at Americas public universities. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Fact Checker

Frequently Asked Questions & Common Misconceptions about Statewide Assessment

COMMON MISCONCEPTION: “The state of New Jersey already moved away from PARCC by transitioning to the NJ Student Learning Assessment (NJSLA).”

In early 2019, the New Jersey Department of Education rebranded the PARCC assessment as the New Jersey Student Learning Assessment (NJSLA). The NJSLA is in fact the SAME test as the PARCC, albeit marginally shorter. The NJDOE shortened the PARCC assessment testing timeframes by approximately 25%. The contracts for the PARCC/NJSLA remain with the same testing contractors, Pearson and New Meridian¹. So, no, the state has NOT transitioned away from the PARCC assessment.

COMMON MISCONCEPTION: “Data from PARCC/NJSLA allows the state to ensure equity for the most historically marginalized students. Without this data, how will we know where ‘achievement gaps’ exist and where students are not being appropriately served?”

Standardized assessments do not enhance equity; they reinforce inequity. Equality assumes that everyone benefits from the same supports, while equity provides everyone with the support that they need to succeed. Our current statewide assessment system does not allow for districts or educators to provide students with these supports. Empirical research conducted in New Jersey has continuously demonstrated that student results on statewide assessments can be predicted by community and family income levels².

Districts already collect rich and relevant data outside of the statewide standardized testing data that reveal disparities within their student populations. Testing proponents argue that statewide standardized testing data reveals “achievement gaps,” when in reality, these tests serve to further opportunity gaps by restricting historically marginalized students’ access to higher level coursework.

Historically, districts have not been given the supports and resources needed to appropriately

support students and effectively address these disparities. Further, the immense amount of time dedicated to standardized test preparation and implementation further consumes valuable instructional time and resources with no valuable return.

COMMON MISCONCEPTION: “The PARCC/NJSLA is a check on grade inflation. Without it, how will we know that students are career and college ready? How will we reduce the remediation rate at the college level?”

Performance on a standardized assessment does not indicate career and college readiness. State regulations provide an overview of the requirements for students to graduate. Students are required to take and pass 120 credits worth of coursework, demonstrate proficiency on locally designed and administered assessments, and meet attendance standards. There is no research basis in the claim that PARCC/NJSLA, or any standardized assessment, will address the concern that too many students are not college ready and require remedial coursework. Nor is there research that shows PARCC/NJSLA performance is a predictor of future success. There is, however, research that confirms that a student’s transcript/high school grades are what make a high school diploma truly meaningful and give the most accurate picture of a student’s readiness for college and career, despite the grade inflation argument³.

College-level remedial coursework is simply a money-making scheme. It may be intended to enhance student understanding, but it becomes a significant barrier for historically marginalized populations, becoming a trap for students. We can look to the successful practices of NJ’s own Rowan University and Warren County Community College (WCCC). Rowan’s program provides students with mathematics coursework pathways instead of remedial coursework and WCCC abolished remedial courses entirely, seeing an immediate doubling of their graduation rate. Remedial coursework at the college level becomes an unnecessary barrier for students, but a financial boon for higher education institutions.

COMMON MISCONCEPTION: “By eliminating additional statewide standardized assessments at the high school level, we would be lowering expectations for students.”

Reducing assessments at the high school level does not lower expectations, it places an emphasis on quality over quantity. Research shows that a rigorous sequence of courses, high-quality curricula, and student performance in their coursework is the greatest indicator of college and/or career readiness³. By reducing the number of assessments at the high school level, we place the emphasis back on instructional time, teaching and learning.

Dr. Arthur VanderVeen, CEO of New Meridian, the company that is contracted by the state of New Jersey to license content of our NJSLA, urged the State Board of Education to shift its focus away from testing in July 2018. He stated, “The more important indicator of post-secondary readiness is the curriculum and not the assessment. States should be focusing on ensuring a rigorous sequence of courses instead of focusing on an assessment⁵.” Dr. VanderVeen’s company receives a significant profit from the state’s \$30+ million statewide assessment system budget, and a reduction in testing would significantly reduce his bottom line. Yet, he urges the state to focus its energies elsewhere.

COMMON MISCONCEPTION: “The educators want to do away with PARCC/NJSLA because they just don’t want to be held accountable. This is all about politics and not about the children.”

PARCC/NJSLA accountability, as applied to the high school assessments, is at the district level and not tied back to individual teachers. The median Student Growth Percentile, a flawed measure that is intended to show the impact an individual teacher has upon the growth of their students⁶, can ONLY be applied to qualifying educators—those in grades 4-8 language arts and those in grades 4-7 math⁷. There is no individual teacher accountability measure at the high school level, due to the nature and design of the assessments.

Educators want and welcome true accountability. However, the PARCC/NJSLA assessment is subject to a great deal of influence from outside factors that impact its utility⁸. For example, are the math

problems using vocabulary that is above the grade level of students being tested? Are students struggling to use the finicky technology tools to appropriately communicate their responses? The list of outside factors goes on and on.

COMMON MISCONCEPTION: “Why wouldn’t we want as much statewide standardized assessment data as possible? After all, these tests don’t harm students, don’t harm teachers, and don’t harm our districts.”

Policymakers in our state and throughout the country insist on focusing their energies on increased high-stakes standardized testing, despite the fact that increased testing has not led to improved outcomes for students⁹. Their common, yet misguided, argument is that standardized tests are the primary means of enhancing equity for historically marginalized populations. However, this couldn’t be further from the truth. Our current statewide assessment system does not allow for districts or educators to provide our students with the resources and supports they need to be successful. Instead, the state allocates over \$30 million year on testing, a significant portion of which is dedicated to unnecessary testing at the high school level.

These tests most certainly harm our students, our teachers, and our districts. Standardized assessments have many unintended consequences for students, educators, and schools. Of particular note is the devastating impact standardized testing has on student mental health. On average, students are experiencing higher levels of stress and anxiety than today’s adult population¹⁰. Students identify testing as the primary source of stress in their lives. Standardized test anxiety results in damages to children’s psychological and emotional well-being, impediments to social functioning and the development of positive social relationships, development of negative attitudes toward school and learning¹¹, physiological reactions from students¹², including crying, vomiting, loss of bowel/bladder control, and adverse emotional reactions, such as loss of student sense of identity, self-concept, self-efficacy, self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-worth. Finally, and most alarmingly, a correlation exists between the rising adolescent suicide rate and emphasis on standardized testing¹³.

COMMON MISCONCEPTION: “We have heard all about the challenges and concerns with PARCC/NJSLA, but the Every Student Succeeds Act mandates states test students in English/language arts and math annually in grades 3-8 and once during high school and in science once in elementary, once in middle school, and once in high school. What else can we do?”

It is true that statewide assessment is federally mandated, but New Jersey goes far beyond the federal requirements with FOUR additional and costly assessments at the high school level. However, under the federal Every Student Succeeds Act, New Jersey has the opportunity to apply for a federally approved pilot—the Innovative Assessment Pilot—where we can institute classroom-based, curriculum-embedded performance assessments that fulfill the federal requirements and allow our students to develop the competency needed for success, whether college or career bound¹⁴.

Performance assessment measures and reflects the authentic performance we see in the world—consider a musician performing in an orchestra, a woodworker designing and constructing a building, a journalist outlining and constructing a fact-based argument for a national news outlet, a chef conceptualizing and creating a new recipe, a scientist designing and conducting an experiment to test the effectiveness of a theory. Under the Innovative Assessment Pilot, New Jersey has the opportunity to create an equitable, authentic, and performance-based system of assessment that creates opportunity and real-world skills for all of our students, no matter what path they take beyond high school.

COMMON MISCONCEPTION “If a child opts out or refuses the PARCC/NJSLA, there are significant repercussions for the teachers and the district.”

While New Jersey does not currently have an “opt out” or refusal provision, no district can force a child to take a statewide standardized test. Districts are required to make provisions for students who opt out or refuse the statewide assessment. Districts cannot force parents to keep students home during testing days, if the child is refusing the test¹⁵.

Student performance on the statewide assessment

is factored into 5% of the evaluation scores for grade 4-8 English/language arts teachers and grades 4-7 math teachers. These scores have no impact on nontested subject-area teachers and teachers at the high school level. When a child opts out or refuses the statewide standardized assessment, this has no impact on the individual teacher’s evaluation score⁷.

Student performance on statewide standardized assessments affects the creation of the School Performance Reports issued by the New Jersey Department of Education. When a child opts out/refuses the assessment, their performance is only counted as a nonproficient score toward the district’s School Performance Report, only if the district falls below 95% participation. This categorization only affects the district performance report and does not tie back to the individual child.

There are concerns that opting out/refusing the assessment may risk district loss of funding. However, legislation exists in the state of New Jersey (S-2881/A-4485) that prevents state aid from being withheld from school districts because parents refuse the statewide standardized assessment. This legislation was signed into law on Nov. 9, 2015¹⁶. So, NO, districts will NOT lose funding due to students opting out/refusing the statewide assessment.

COMMON MISCONCEPTION: “New Jersey’s public schools were recently ranked No. 1 by Education Week. We got to this point due to our high expectations and rigorous exams. If we cut back our statewide standardized assessments, we are only hurting our students and will likely see our ranking drop.”

There’s no question that New Jersey has the top schools and educators in the country, but PARCC/NJSLA testing doesn’t factor into how we achieved this top-ranking status. According to Education Week, their Quality Counts ranking system takes into account three major areas:

- The Chance for Success Index, which reviews the educational opportunities from birth through entrance into the workforce. This includes, parental education and income levels, preschool access and kindergarten enrollment, and post-secondary enrollment rates.

- The School Finance Category, which analyzes how equitably funds and resources are distributed to districts and relative state spending on education.
- The K-12 Achievement Index, which measures performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, AP Test Scores, and high school graduation rates¹⁷.

With these factors, it's no surprise that the highest-ranking states have higher income levels and the lowest ranking states have greater income disparities.

Under the Federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), states are required to test students annually in math and English/language arts in grades 3 through 8 and once in math and English/language arts during high school. Science testing occurs once during each of these grade bands: 3-5; 6-8; 9-12. If the state of New Jersey commits to reducing testing to the federal requirement, we would remove four tests at the high school level. Districts will still have the necessary data to determine performance at the high school level. Performance at the district level does not drastically change from one year to the next. Removing excessive data points will allow for a clearer focus on curriculum, teaching and learning, which is what has a lasting impact on student growth.

If New Jersey is serious about properly educating our students and maintaining our high rankings, we must reduce our policy-makers' fanaticism about PARCC/NJSLA and reallocate our funding and resources to the core supports our students truly need.

COMMON MISCONCEPTION: "As a state, we are currently suffering under a fiscal crisis. Many districts have lost significant funding under S-2, resulting in the need to cut teachers and essential programming. Funding is a priority right now, not statewide assessment."

Yes, districts throughout our state are currently suffering, significantly, due to funding cuts under S-2. Reduced funding is forcing districts to cut effective teachers and programming for students¹⁸. For the 2019-20 school year alone, the cuts to districts across the state total more than **\$90 million dollars**.

However, the state currently spends over \$30 million dollars a year on statewide standardized testing¹⁹. A significant portion of this money is dedicated to excessive testing and retesting at the high school level, which goes well beyond the federal requirement of ONE year of testing at the high school level. NJ requires—at significant cost—four additional assessments at the high school level. Data show that effective teachers and programming make a lasting impact on our kids, while testing does not. It's time we start asking our legislators what they value more—cutting teachers or cutting tests?

*For supporting research, more information, and questions on the enclosed please reach out to assessment@njea.org

The NJDOE's Assessment Proposal vs. A-1624/S-1021: Frequently Asked Questions

FAQ: "What will it take to graduate under the NJDOE's proposal? Under Sen. Teresa Ruiz's/ Assemblywoman Pamela Lampitt's bill?"

NJDOE Proposal: Under the NJDOE's proposal, students in the Classes of 2023 through 2025 would be required to sit for the State Graduation Proficiency Test English/Math during their 11th grade year. If students pass, they fulfill the exit exam requirement for graduation. If they are unsuccessful on the test, students may then use an assessment from the menu of alternate pathways (SAT, ACT, ACCUPLACER, ASVAB, etc.) or the portfolio assessment during 12th grade to fulfill the graduation exam requirement. An End of Course assessment is offered during the 9th grade year, but students are not required to sit for the assessment²⁰.

Under S-1021 and A-1624: Sen. Teresa Ruiz's and Assemblywoman Pamela Lampitt's bills, should they pass, allow for students to be required to sit for and pass six assessments (English 9, 10, 11 and Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II) prior to fulfilling the exit exam requirement. The bill does not put a limit on the number of assessments that could be required for graduation. This is reflective of the Regents Exam in New York State, where in addition to math and English/language arts, students are tested in civics, global history, U.S. history, chemistry, earth science, physics, etc.

Should a student fail one or more of the assessments, they will be required to have remediation—whether successful in the course or not. Remediation could mean extra or repeated coursework, extended school day/school year, additional school years, and results in lost electives and lost opportunities for advanced coursework.

If a student is not successful on any of the required assessments, they will then access the portfolio option during the 12th grade²¹.

Further, as currently written, A-1624 and S-1021 upend the compromise proposal pending before the SBOE. This would require the regulatory process to start over, prolonging uncertainty of graduation requirements. In addition, the bills undermine the consent decree that allowed students in the Classes of 2021 and 2022 to be grandfathered under the previous graduation

pathways. However, with the passing of these bills, the graduation requirements for New Jersey's current sophomores and juniors will change once again.

It is unknown whether the menu of alternate pathways will remain, but it is well-known that Sen. Ruiz does not approve of the menu of alternate pathways that more than 50% of students statewide use to fulfill their graduation exam requirement. In her Oct. 1, 2019 op-ed in the Asbury Park Press, Sen. Ruiz states "The department is also again proposing to keep the menu of options that are not aligned to New Jersey standards²²."

*Please see the accompanying visual depicting the onerous pathway to graduation possible under Senator Ruiz and Assemblywoman Lampitt's bills.

What happens to the opt out under the NJDOE's proposal? Under the bill?

Under the NJDOE proposal students in the Classes of 2023 through 2025, can opt out of any and all standardized assessments across grades 3 through 11. Students would then take the portfolio option during their 12th grade year. If a child would like to use an alternate assessment under the menu of approved alternate pathways, they must first sit for the State Graduation Proficiency Test in ELA and math during their 11th-grade year. Language in the existing state statute requires that students can opt out of standardized assessment and simply gain access to the portfolio during their 12th-grade year²⁰.

*Please see the accompanying visual depicting the pathways to graduation under this proposal.

Under S-1021 and A-1624: Opt out is no longer possible. Students must sit for the "requisite assessment or assessments" as determined by the State Board of Education. There is no limit on the number of "requisite assessment or assessments" that could be determined under this option. The

language in these bills would replace the existing state statute, forcing students to sit for any number of “requisite assessment or assessments” prior to being granted access to the portfolio option during their 12th-grade year²¹.

*For supporting research, more information, and questions on the enclosed please reach out to assessment@njea.org

¹New Jersey Department of Education Broadcast. (2019, Feb. 22). Spring 2019 Blueprints for the New Jersey Student Learning Assessment. Retrieved from <https://homeroom5.doe.state.nj.us/broadcasts/2019/FEB/22/19683/Spring%202019%20Blueprints%20for%20the%20New%20Jersey%20Student%20Learning%20Assessments.pdf>

²Christopher H. Tienken, Anthony Colella, Christian Angelillo, Meredith Fox, Kevin R. McCahill & Adam Wolfe (2017). Predicting Middle Level State Standardized Test Results Using Family and Community Demographic Data, RMLE Online, 40:1, 1-13, DOI: 10.1080/19404476.2016.1252304

³Hiss, William, 2014. “Defining Promise: Optional Standardized Testing Policies in American College and University Admissions.”

⁴Austin, W. (2019, April 9). Four things my college did to more than double our graduation rate. Retrieved from <https://www.ecampusnews.com/2019/04/10/college-more-than-double-graduation-rate/>.

⁵New Jersey State Board of Education Meeting Transcript, July 2018.

⁶Betebenner, D. (2009). Norm- and Criterion-Referenced Student Growth. Educational Measurement: Issues and Practice, 28(4), 42–51. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-3992.2009.00161.x>

⁷New Jersey Department of Education. (2019) “What is mSGP and how is it calculated?” Retrieved from <https://www.state.nj.us/education/AchieveNJ/teacher/percentile.shtml>

⁸Weber, M. (2018, July 17). Jersey Jazzman: The PARCC, Phil Murphy, and Some Common Sense. Retrieved from <https://nepc.colorado.edu/blog/parcc-phil-murphy>.

⁹Dee, T.S. & Jacob, B.A. 2006. “Do High School Exit Exams Influence Educational Attainment or Labor Market Performance?” Social Science Research Network, April. http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=900985

¹⁰American Psychological Association. (2014). Stress in America. Are teens adopting adults’ stress habits? Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress/2013/stress-report.pdf>

¹¹Alliance for Childhood. (2001). Rethink high-stakes testing. Top doctors, educators warn federal push on tests harmful to children’s health, education [Press release]. Retrieved from http://drupal6.allianceforchildhood.org/testing_press_release

¹²Segool, N. K., Carlson, J. S., Goforth, A. N., von der Embse, N. and Barterian, J. A. (2013). Heightened test anxiety among young children: Elementary school students’ anxious responses to high-stakes testing. Psychology in the Schools, 50(5), 489–499. doi:10.1002/pits.21689

¹³Singer, S. (2017). Middle school suicides double as Common Core testing intensifies. Huffington Post. Retrieved from https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/middle-school-suicides-double-as-common-core-testing_us_59822d3de4b03d0624b0abb9

¹⁴Innovative Assessment Demonstration Authority. (2019, October 28). Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/iada/index.html>.

¹⁵Mooney, J. (2015, January 8). State Board of Education Members Put to the Test by Anti-Testing Turnout. Retrieved from <https://www.njspotlight.com/2015/01/15-01-07-anti-testing-turnout-puts-state-board-of-education-to-the-test/>.

¹⁶New Jersey. Legislature. Assembly. An act concerning the withholding of State school aid...(A-4485). 2015. (November 9, 2015). New Jersey State Assembly.

¹⁷“Quality Counts 2019: Grading the States,” Education Week, September 2019, <https://www.edweek.org/ew/collections/quality-counts-2019-state-achievement/index.html>

¹⁸Education Law Center. (2018, June 6). Retrieved December 9, 2019, from <https://edlawcenter.org/news/archives/school-funding/aid-cuts-loom-for-students-in-188-nj-districts.html>.

¹⁹2019-2020 New Jersey State Appropriations Handbook

²⁰New Jersey Department of Education. (2019, October 21). Notice of Proposed Substantial Changes. Retrieved December 9, 2019, from <https://www.nj.gov/education/sboe/meetings/agenda/2019/October21SpecialMeeting/2%20Item%20A%20Standards%20and%20Assessment.pdf>

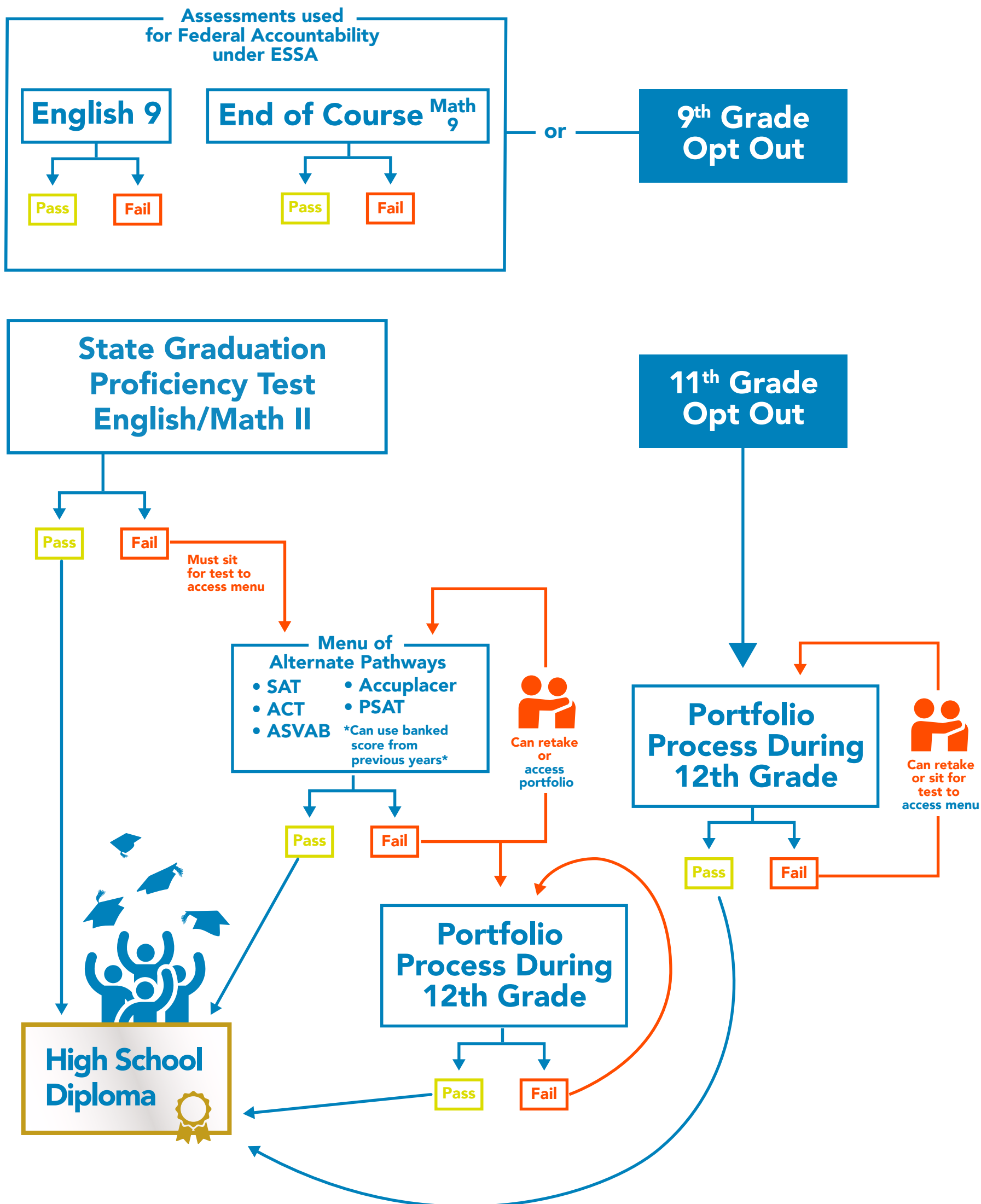
²¹New Jersey. Legislature. Assembly. An Act concerning State assessment requirements for high school graduation...(A-4957). 2019. (Introduced January 28, 2019). New Jersey State Assembly.

²²Ruiz, M. T. (2019, October 1). State education department renegeing on graduation assessment compromise. Retrieved December 9, 2019, from <https://www.app.com/story/opinion/columnists/2019/10/01/state-education-department-renegeing-on-graduation-assessment-compromise/3831420002/>.

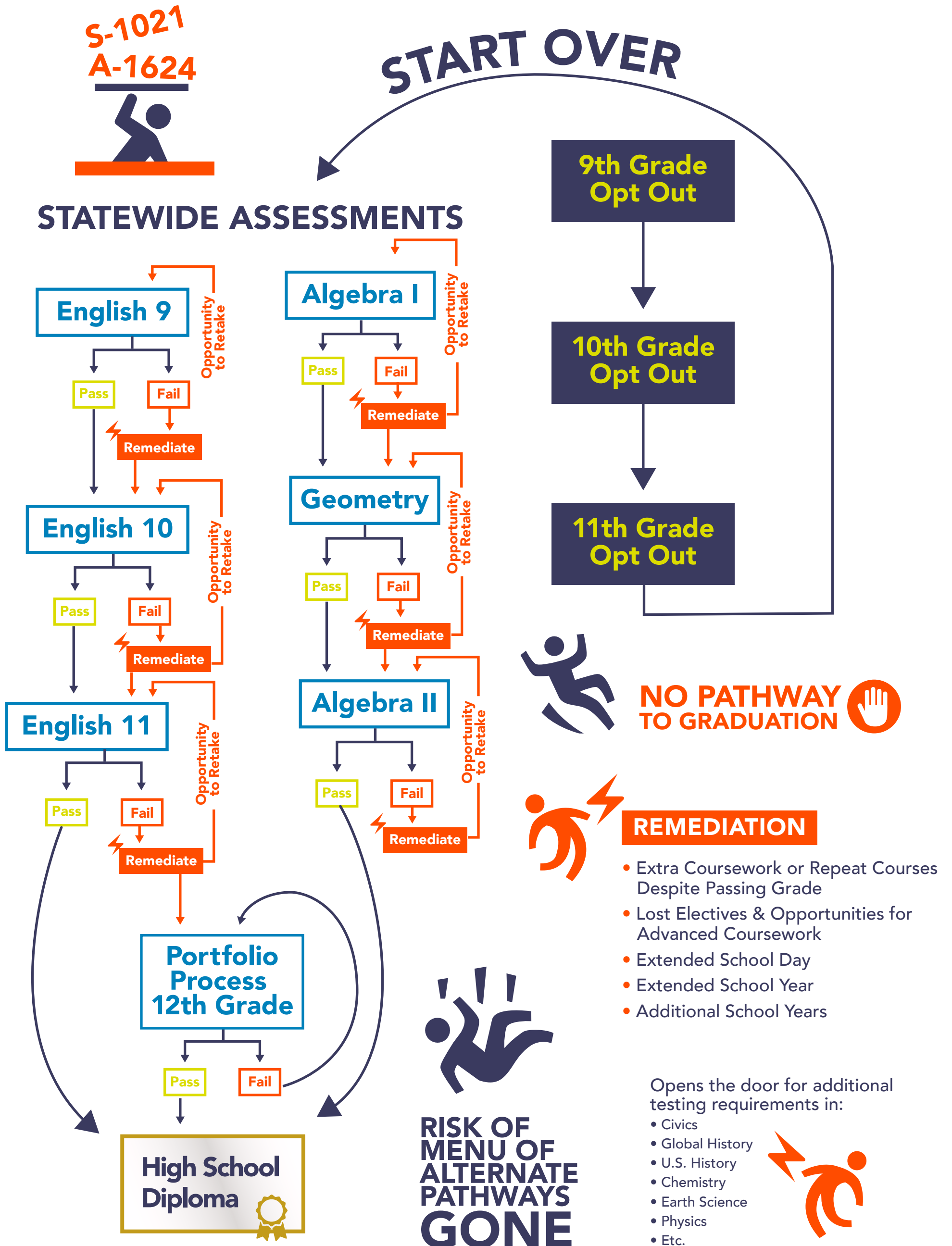
Fall 2019 NJDOE Proposal

NJAC 6A:8 Standards & Assessment

for school years 2021-2025



What **S-1021** (Ruiz) and **A-1624** (Lampitt) allow for:





PARCC Student Journey

BEFORE PARCC

DURING PARCC

AFTER PARCC

Disparate Experiences with Curriculum and Instruction

Students described different experiences with PARCC depending upon their academic placement. Students in AP courses stated that nothing changes for them in the weeks leading up to PARCC. College Prep students, however, described a time of significant, rote test prep. Students not yet in high school universally cited extensive test prep in the weeks leading to PARCC. Those in AP classes expressed dread at the boredom of testing days, while those in college prep courses expressed stress and exhaustion.

Student Mental Health

Students subjected to test prep stated that they experienced stress, exhaustion, burn out, and shame. There were a number of comments about complaining during this time because of both the stress and the desire to do more personally relevant work. "Rushing through practice tests to do other work for grades."

"Disappointed in Us"

Students explicitly stated that they were "disappointing" the adults through their lack of effort, apathy toward, or poor preparation for PARCC. Students demonstrated a perception that PARCC has value to the adults, yet little personal value for students. This led students to believe their behavior and feelings toward PARCC would "disappoint" the adults in their lives.

Effort

Students overwhelmingly described a lack of effort, citing peers randomly clicking through answers and others finishing as quickly as possible so that they could spend the remainder of test administration time sleeping.

Strict Atmosphere

Students described PARCC administration as a time of strict control. Students are forced to be silent, even after they have completed the test. While they are permitted to sleep, sit quietly, or read a novel, students are prohibited from studying, reviewing notes, or completing work for their classes. Many would like a break once they are finished with the test.

Emotional Impact

A small minority of responses cited taking the PARCC in earnest. These students described their experience as frustrating and confusing. Multiple responses cited crying and "loud sobs" followed by worry about their performance. Some stated, "Eventually, I stop caring."

Continued Testing

The students in AP classes described the time post-PARCC as one of increasing stress due to looming AP tests. They see these tests as more personally relevant and resent being forced to spend a week on the PARCC test.

Relief

A set of students stated that they were relieved after PARCC administration. They were happy to return to a normal schedule where they understood what was going on in class and could interact with their friends.

Burnout

A set of students expressed a diminished ability to continue school work because they felt so burned out from PARCC. Students described themselves as "tired; feeling dead." Following the PARCC, students stated that they discussed PARCC questions, how they answered them, poorly constructed questions, how "dumb" they felt, and concern over performance.

The prevailing student feelings during this time are **apathy, stress, and exhaustion.**

The prevailing student feelings during this time are **boredom, frustration, and tiredness.**

The prevailing student feelings during this time are **stress, aggravation, resentment; relief.**



Students expressed extreme differences in their experiences, based upon their course placement.

"All of the students look sad and stressed" versus "No one cares. Everyone just wants to get it done with. Sweet half days."



Students shared a great deal of comments regarding the impact PARCC has upon their mental health.

"I'm going to drop out."



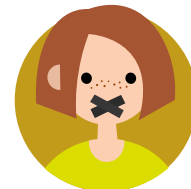
Many students commonly expressed the perception that they are disappointing the adults.

"You would be disappointed in my lack of preparation for PARCC."



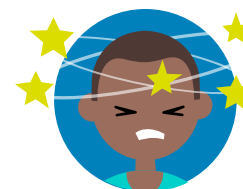
Student commonly expressed a lack of effort on the assessment.

"Take five minutes on test, fall asleep for three hours."



Students dislike the impact PARCC implementation has on the school atmosphere and wish their time could be used more productively.

"School feels like punishment."



PARCC has an extreme impact on student emotions, for those who take the test seriously. The Journey Maps were riddled with "I'm going to drop out" quotes.



Students are fed up with the amount of testing that occurs throughout the year. They see the value in some tests, but not in others.

"AP tests are coming fast, and we just wasted a whole week."



Students experience relief after the conclusion of the PARCC and are pleased to get back to their normal routine.

"Thank God they're done."



For some students, the pressure and emphasis on PARCC results in burnout and resignation.

"My brain has officially stopped processing."



PARCC Teacher Journey

BEFORE PARCC

Curriculum and Instruction

In the weeks leading up to PARCC administration, school and classroom routines begin to shift. More time is dedicated to cramming in information for the test because it is administered before the end of the school year. Test prep begins to take more time, both during and after school. The shifting routines result in a loss of valuable teaching time in exchange for preparing students to take the PARCC test.

Student Mental Health

In the weeks leading up to administration, educators begin to focus on students' mental health—managing student anxiety over the test, frustration over the shifting schedule, and waning engagement with the emphasis on learning PARCC software, practice testing, and test prep. This ranges from interpersonal reassurances, counseling, and encouragement to PARCC pep rallies.

Technology

While PARCC has brought more technology into schools, the technology gets sequestered in the weeks leading up to the test. As much as one month prior to administration, IT departments take the technology away to configure it for testing. This coincides with the optimal time to teach students how to use the technology effectively on the test, leading to frustration. It also constrains educators who have built classroom routines and differentiation around modern technology.

School Disruption

Managing refusal requests, schedule changes, school technology, and space availability are disruptive to school. These disruptions affect educator planning, course consistency, class meeting days and times, access to resources, and considerable lost instructional time. Additionally, the classroom environment is disrupted as teachers are required to remove any posters and informational materials with content-specific tips, formulas, etc. resulting in bare walls and sterile classroom environments.

DURING PARCC

Impact on Time

On days when PARCC is administered, learning time is affected before, during, and after test administration. Half of the day is dedicated to completing the test and the students are either physically exhausted or disengaged after testing. In many cases, students are forced to sit and do nothing due to early PARCC section completion or test refusal. Nontesting classrooms are also disrupted because they must be quiet to not disrupt nearby testing classrooms and they cannot access resources like technology or the library.

Conflicted Process

Educators are supporting and encouraging students through an experience that both educators and students know has no personal meaning, value, or purpose to students as individuals. Further, the educators have no authority to make the test or testing experience more relevant to their students. Educators expressed significant concerns with technology: "breakdown of equipment and internet" as well as suboptimal testing conditions such as a "gym with 120 students on laptops," creating additional hurdles to success.

Exhibited Effort

During testing, educators express that many students do not exhibit effort on the PARCC. Students are observed simply "clicking through" the test, surrendering quickly due to frustration, and frequently "going to sleep" instead of exerting best effort on the PARCC assessment.

Continued Testing

In the weeks after PARCC, there is little reprieve from testing. At all levels, teachers are preparing students for final assessments, benchmarks, and the state-required science standardized assessments. Additionally, many high school teachers are preparing their students for AP testing. There is immense frustration because PARCC undermines the teachers' ability to fully prepare their students for these other tests that are more immediately relevant and significant to students and teachers alike.

Continued Disruption

Immediately following PARCC administration, technology and other resources are still not available for classroom use, as schools must undergo makeup testing. Students are pulled from classes to complete makeup PARCC assessments, further disrupting classroom instructional time, curricular timelines, and class schedules. Libraries and resources remain inaccessible throughout this time frame. Student services may be disrupted (child study team, guidance counselor or access) due to the need for proctoring.

Repairing the System

PARCC is such a focal point and heavy emphasis for schools that its completion leaves students with a sense that the school year has ended. This, coupled with the timing of test administration, creates a situation where teachers need to re-establish the classroom culture of teaching, learning, and productivity. PARCC's timing creates the impression that the "year is over" among students while simultaneously creating a sense of frustration and urgency for teachers to overcome this faulty impression.

The prevailing educator feelings during this time are **frustration, anxiety, stress, anger, and confusion.**

The prevailing educator feelings during this time are **stress and frustration** followed by **exhaustion and discouragement.**

The prevailing educator feelings during this time are **relief, yet exhaustion; frustration and an urgency to make up for lost time.**



PARCC timing constrains the curriculum, resulting in:

- Teaching to the test.
- A coverage model over a focus on developing deep understanding.
- A focus on PARCC skill development over competency development.



The test creates an anxious time for teachers that creates anxiety in students.

"I believe in assessments, but not at the expense of my students' mental health."
- NJ Educator



Tech configuration disrupts both normal teaching and the ability to fully prepare students to navigate the testing software.

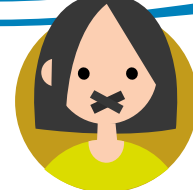


School routines and schedules are halted, making school unpredictable for students and teachers alike. This greatly affects teacher planning and school culture.



PARCC affects learning time by constraining available minutes for teaching, diminishing a student's willingness to learn, altering the surrounding learning environment, and reducing the availability of resources such as technology and spaces. PARCC administration affects those not testing as well.

"Sorry - no gym, music, art, or recess again because the big kids are testing." - NJ Educator



PARCC forces teachers to advocate for a process that has little perceived value to either teachers or students as individuals. This forced disingenuousness has a negative impact upon how teachers see themselves.

"This is not why I became a teacher."
- NJ Educator



PARCC imposes an overly strict culture upon the school during its administration. Students become frustrated and overwhelmed by the experience; many are seen shutting down and giving up.



PARCC is immediately followed by final exams and AP testing. PARCC testing is seen as an irrelevant exercise interfering with more personally relevant activities.



PARCC causes lingering disruption post-administration as resources are tied up for make up testing and inventorying while service providers are pulled to proctor.



The timing and taxing nature of the PARCC has a lasting impact on the remainder of the school year.

"PARCC frustrates my students so much that some lose hope and give up for the rest of the school year." - NJ Educator



PARCC Parent Journey

BEFORE PARCC

Curricular Impact

Parents expressed significant frustration over the impact PARCC has upon curriculum. Parents shared experiences with physical education and special electives being suspended for PARCC preparation prior to test administration, students being enrolled in courses beneath their ability (solely due to PARCC performance), and aggravation over test prep during the weeks prior to PARCC administration. Parents with students who are both tested and not tested noted that the nontested children do not experience any of the frustrating practices.

Strained Parent/Child Relationships

Parents described strained relationships with their children in the weeks leading up to PARCC. The children exhibit uncharacteristically "snappy," "frustrated," and "anxious" behavior during this time. Children demonstrate resentment towards their parents when parents do not refuse the test. This stands in contrast to students in untested areas or those refusing PARCC. These children were described as relaxed with regard to how they interacted with their parents.

Resentment/Confusion Over Graduation

Parents expressed extreme disagreement with and a lack of understanding of the graduation requirements, stating that the NJDOE's requirements were "unclear" and a "moving target." This confusion, paired with the emotional impact PARCC has upon their children, has resulted in feelings of resentment over PARCC as a graduation requirement.

The prevailing parental feelings during this time are **annoyance**, **confusion**, and **resentment**.

DURING PARCC

Use of Time

Parents questioned the utility of the PARCC exam, citing reports from children that they had yet to learn some of the material, experienced technology issues, witnessed the stress of some test takers and the apathy of others. Parents stated that they feel the data is "useless" and question why their tax dollars are spent on this. After the tests, parents report that learning does not resume for the rest of the day.

Emotional Impact

Parents expressed a sense of guilt at subjecting their children to an assessment that made them feel inadequate, yet served no purpose for them personally. Parents feel trapped over the confusion of whether opting out will harm their child's ability to graduate. Students are also subjected to more rigid discipline during this time.

The prevailing parental feelings during this time are **guilt** and **frustration**.

AFTER PARCC

Return to Normalcy

Parents described a collective sigh of relief from their children over the conclusion of PARCC. Children are "eager and happy to do something again." The learning environment is described as shifting towards being more project-centric.

Continued Resentment

Parents still feel PARCC served no purpose for their children, citing the impact PARCC testing had upon family life, their children's emotional well-being, and the learning environment. This left parents with a desire to hold someone accountable for the PARCC experience.

The prevailing parental feelings during this time are **relief** and **anger**.



Parents dislike the curricular changes due to the constrained schedule.

"Our school district no longer incorporates novels in English class, only excerpts. As a parent, I was told, 'curriculum mirrors PARCC—no novels, just excerpts, like the test.'"

- Parent



Parents resent the strain PARCC causes on relationships with their children. Parents feel stuck - they want to advocate for their children's best interests, yet know their children are forced to take the PARCC in order to graduate.

"My children are at stake."

- Parent



Parents feel confused by lack of clarity over New Jersey's PARCC graduation requirements and fear for their children's futures. This exacerbates resentment towards PARCC.

"PARCC has got to change—the damage is to the community as well as the school."

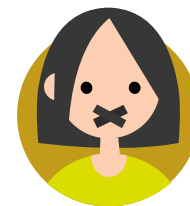
- Parent



Parents see all of the variables that undermine PARCC as a viable data source and question why significant time and resources are spent on the PARCC assessment.

"I hope they come up with a more equitable assessment—one that makes a student eager to know their progress, with scores easier to read, and suggestions for parents and teachers."

- Parent



Parents see PARCC as harmful to their child personally and emotionally, yet powerless to do anything about it, because of state mandates.

"Why are we subjecting our kids to these kinds of tests?"

- Parent



Parents are relieved to see their children happy to go to school once again.

"My daughter's eyes light up to have art class back."

- Parent



Parents want to hold someone accountable for subjecting their children and families to PARCC testing.

"Who thought this was a good idea and approved this disaster?"

- Parent