



State of New Jersey

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
PO BOX 500
TRENTON, NJ 08625-0500

JON S. CORZINE
Governor

LUCILLE E. DAVY
Commissioner

September 10, 2008

Dear Parents,

This past spring, more than 400,000 New Jersey elementary and middle school students took the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJ ASK), in grades 5, 6, 7, and 8. These NJ ASK tests, and those to be administered next year in grades 3 and 4, represent a new generation of statewide assessments, designed to produce a better measure of student academic achievement. The new grade 5-8 tests administered in 2008 were redesigned, with the goal of producing better information about student mastery of the *New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards* (CCCS), information that will help improve student learning and classroom instruction.

The significant change in these tests is redefining the expectations for determining if a student is "proficient" in the subject area. This year, we raised the bar to require that students earn at least 50 percent of the possible test points in order to be deemed proficient. This decision was made in collaboration with a broad cross-section of state educational leaders, employers, national experts, and individual teachers here in New Jersey, whom we consulted both in designing the tests and in establishing the standards for proficiency in these core subjects. The State Board of Education formally adopted these standards on July 20, 2008. One result of this raising of the achievement standards is that more students may fall into the "partially proficient" category.

We believe that elevating expectations for achievement in the elementary and middle grades is critical for preparing students for postsecondary education and the 21st century workforce. Raising the standards will mean that fewer students are allowed to "slide by" during these critical years. Raising standards at these grades will increase the likelihood that students receive the assistance and intervention they need to succeed in high school *before* they enter ninth grade. I believe that in raising the standards for student learning, we are investing in the future of our students. We are committing to work with school districts to provide the support needed to raise achievement levels before students enter high school, so that students can take advantage of rich academic opportunities that every New Jersey high school offers.

Assessment scores provide one important source of information about student achievement, but they are not the only source. The new NJ ASK scores, like other test scores generated by the Department of Education, should be considered along with other measures of achievement, such as grades, teacher observations, parent observations, student activities, and homework. Above all, the NJ ASK scores should be the basis of conversations between parents and teachers and school leaders about your child's progress.

We expect to pursue an ongoing dialogue with educators and parents about all of these issues. If you have questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact Jay Doolan, assistant commissioner, Division of Educational Standards and Programs, at (609) 292-1083 or by email at jay.doolan@doe.state.nj.us; or to Timothy Peters, director, Office of State Assessments, at (609) 984-7761 or timothy.peters@doe.state.nj.us.

Sincerely,

Lucille E. Davy

LED/JD/TP/memo:higher standards
c: Members, State Board of Education

www.nj.gov/education