



STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

A Memo from the New Jersey Department of Education

Date: April 14, 2021
To: Chief School Administrators, Charter School and Renaissance School Project Leads
Route To: District Test Coordinators, District Technology Coordinators, School Test Coordinators
From: Lisa J. Gleason, Ed.D., Assistant Commissioner
Division of Academics and Performance

USED's Determination Regarding NJ's Requirements to Administer 2020-2021 Statewide Assessments

On April 6, 2021, the United States Department of Education (USED), recognizing that "we are in the midst of a pandemic that requires real flexibility," informed the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) that the administration of Start Strong assessments in fall 2021 will satisfy the federal statewide assessment requirement to administer general assessments in English language arts, mathematics, and science for the 2020-2021 school year. Therefore, there will be no spring 2021 administration of the New Jersey Student Learning Assessments (NJSLA). This flexibility shall apply only to the 2020-2021 school year.

The USED is still requiring the NJDOE to administer ACCESS/Alternate ACCESS for ELLs or Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM). Therefore, the administration of the ACCESS/Alternate ACCESS for ELLs and DLM assessments will continue as described in the NJDOE's March 17, 2021 [broadcast](#). The NJDOE will also continue to move forward with the data collection component outlined in [The Road Forward](#) Plan.

Additionally, USED [approved](#) NJDOE's request to waive 2021 accountability and school identification requirements, which includes:

- Measuring and reporting progress toward long-term goals and measurements of interim progress;
- Calculation of indicator scores and summative ratings;
- Adjusting proficiency rates if participation rates are below 95 percent;
- Identifying schools for comprehensive support and improvement (CSI), targeted support and improvement for consistently underperforming student groups (TSI), or additional targeted support and improvement for low-performing student groups (ATSI); and
- Reporting on student growth (median student growth percentiles).

The NJDOE deeply appreciates the resilience and flexibility that all New Jersey educators and students have demonstrated over the last several months. Understanding that the uncertainties of the pandemic have created difficulties for planning and scheduling and in light of the recent determination by the USED school districts will now implement statewide assessments according to the following schedule:

Statewide Assessment	New Testing Window
ACCESS/Alternate ACCESS for ELLs	April 5, 2021 to June 11, 2021 (No Change)
DLM	April 5, 2021 to June 11, 2021 (No Change)
NJSLA Spring 2021 ELA, Math and Science	Cancelled
Start Strong Fall 2021 ELA, Math, and Science	September 13, 2021 to October 22, 2021

Assessment Administration Update for 2020-2021: ACCESS and Alternate ACCESS for ELLs and Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM) Assessments

- The USED informed New Jersey that to meet Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) assessment requirements, the NJDOE must administer the DLM assessments and the ACCESS/Alternate ACCESS for ELLs assessments in spring 2021. **Therefore, as communicated in the NJDOE's March 17, 2021 broadcast, requirements to administer DLM and ACCESS/Alternate ACCESS for ELLs *in person* in the spring 2021 administration window (April 5 through June 11) remain in place.**
 - Administering these assessments in spring 2021 ensures that LEAs will have the data necessary to address the needs of these unique student populations when planning for summer programming such as extended school year opportunities, as well as effectively planning for fall instruction.
 - The NJDOE also recognizes that in administering the DLM assessment, it is important that students have familiarity with the teacher and environment to ensure optimal results. Therefore, spring testing allows for the assessment to be administered in familiar conditions.
 - It is important that school districts provide English Language Learners (ELLs) with ample, early opportunities to exit from or be identified for ELL status. This plan ensures that all students and all groups of students – including ELLs and students with the most significant cognitive disabilities – are assessed on their 2020-2021 learning in a manner that maximizes the availability of high-quality data that empowers districts to effectively support their needs.

Assessment Administration Update for 2020-2021: New Jersey Student Learning Assessments (NJSLA) and the Start Strong Fall 2021

- **The spring 2021 administration of NJSLA ELA, mathematics, and science assessments is cancelled. The NJDOE will administer the Start Strong assessments in fall 2021 to all students in English language arts (ELA) grades 4-10, Mathematics grades 4-8, Algebra I, Geometry and Algebra II, and in Science grades 6, 9, and 12. This flexibility is only being offered for the 2020-2021 school year due to the impact of COVID-19.**
- **Start Strong assessments will be administered *in person* from September 13, 2021 through October 22, 2021.**
- The NJDOE will also enhance the fall 2021 administration of Start Strong as follows:
 - Expand demographic data collection in the student registration process that will mirror the NJSLA demographic data;
 - Expand reporting to provide additional sub-score details on the Individual Student Report (ISR), including appropriate interpretation and use guidance;
 - Integrate Start Strong assessment reports into the Parent Portal established for the NJSLA; and
 - Enhance utilization of additional support resources available through the released assessment item bank.
- Given that Start Strong assessments will be used to satisfy federal general assessment requirements, the same federal reporting requirements that ordinarily apply to NJSLA will apply to Start Strong. This includes public reporting by NJDOE of school-level Start Strong participation and performance disaggregated by student subgroup and reporting of student results to parents by LEAs. Educator reports and ISRs will be available immediately after completion of the assessment. Districts have the option to print out or upload the ISRs to the student information system for parents. Full district reports will be available within 30 days of the close of the districts' testing window and the State aggregate report will be available within 30 days of the close of the Statewide testing window on October 22, 2021.

- The Start Strong assessment utilizes three performance levels (“Strong Support May Be Needed”; “Some Support May Be Needed”; and “Less Support May Be Needed”) to describe the level of support that a student might need to master the current year’s prerequisite skills and concepts. Additional information regarding the fall 2020 administration of Start Strong may be found in the NJDOE’s March 2021 [presentation](#) to the State Board of Education.
- The Start Strong assessments will include all of the same accessibility features included in NJSLA assessments; all students, including students with disabilities and ELLs who are not eligible for the DLM assessments, will be expected to participate in Start Strong just as all students and groups of students are ordinarily expected to participate in NJSLA.

Additional Details

The DLM assessment spring 2021 administration window, which opened on April 5, 2021, will continue as planned. The DLM assessment, as a result of the design of the adaptive and specialized assessment for the specific population of students, does not support an alternative format that would result in information that can be reported to individual parents and the public, and that meets the other requirements of ESSA. Accordingly, the NJDOE has determined that it will administer the DLM assessment in spring 2021 to eligible students who are able to participate. Students who are in remote instruction for the 2020-2021 school year and whose parents do not wish to bring them into the building to test may be coded using the "Parent Refusal" Special Circumstance Code.

The ACCESS and Alternate ACCESS for ELLs administration window, which opened on April 5, 2021, will continue as planned. The ACCESS and Alternate ACCESS for ELLs assessments, because of the design of the assessments for its specific population of students, do not support an alternative format that would meet the other requirements of ESSA. Accordingly, the NJDOE has determined that it will administer the ACCESS and Alternate ACCESS for ELLs assessments in spring 2021 to eligible students who are able to participate. The NJDOE encourages school districts to take advantage of the spring 2021 ACCESS for ELLs administration window to provide ELLs ample opportunities to exit from or be identified for ELL status. If parents of students participating in remote instruction do not wish to bring students into school buildings to participate in testing, then a “Declined” Do Not Score code may be entered for each domain for ACCESS/Alternate ACCESS testing.

At this time, NJSLA District Test Coordinator and District Technology Coordinator training and preparation will cease. More information about training and guidance for the Start Strong assessments as well as details about the NJSLA administration for the 2021-2022 school year will be forthcoming. Additionally, please note that it is expected that all eligible students will participate in the spring 2022 NJSLA statewide assessments as required by ESSA requirements for the administration of statewide assessments.

Contact Information

If you have any questions, please contact the NJDOE’s Office of Assessments at assessment@doe.nj.gov or (609) 376-3960 as we are at the ready to support you.

c: Members, State Board of Education
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 NJDOE Staff
 Statewide Parent Advocacy Network
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