

NJ School Performance Reports – Interpretive Guide

**New Jersey Department of Education
Trenton, NJ 08625**

May 2016

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Purpose

Too often, educators and stakeholders experience the publication of school performance data with fear, confusion and skepticism: What do these data mean? How is my school really doing? What should I do next to help the children in my school do even better? To some extent, our healthy and appropriate adherence to the belief that no one metric can describe a school's performance is a root cause of this confusion. Sometimes multiple metrics present contradictory conclusions, such as a school's high school graduation rate being contradicted by a low passing rate on the high school test. Sometimes metrics move in opposite directions, such as a school's increasing SAT participation rate resulting in a decline in overall SAT scores. In short, making meaning of school performance data is not simple, straightforward, or easy.

Also, while the New Jersey School Performance Reports seek to bring more information to educators and stakeholders about the performance of schools, they do not seek to distill the performance of schools into a single metric, a single score, or a simplified conclusion. Instead, the hope is that educators and stakeholders will engage in deep, lengthy conversations about the full range of the data presented. For each indicator, stakeholders should engage in four types of questions:

1. How did my school do on a particular indicator in 2015? What was the change from 2014? For example: A school's graduation rate in 2015 was 91%, which was a 1% point increase from 2014.
2. How does my school's performance on that indicator compare to other schools that are like mine? For example: My school's graduation rate of 91% yielded a peer percentile of 36, meaning that my school's graduation rate was higher than 36% of my school's peer group.
3. How does my school's performance on that indicator compare to the statewide average on that indicator? For example: My school's graduation rate yielded a statewide percentile of 44, meaning that my school's graduation rate was higher than 44% of high schools across the state.
4. How does my school's performance on that indicator compare to the statewide target? My school's graduation rate of 91% exceeded the state target of 75%.

Asking these four questions of each indicator presented in the performance reports will enable stakeholders to fully understand their school's performance and progress, both from one year to the next, but also with an understanding of how they compare to similar schools, the state, and absolute performance targets.

While some viewers of the School Performance Reports may try to utilize them to create a summative ranking of schools, akin to a "Best New Jersey Schools!" list, NJDOE is not encouraging their use in that fashion. As educators know well, measuring school performance is both an art and a science. While the School Performance Report brings attention to important student outcomes, NJDOE does not collect data about other

essential elements of a school, such as the provision of opportunities to participate and excel in extracurricular activities; the development of non-cognitive skills like time management and perseverance; the pervasiveness of a positive school culture or climate; or the attainment of other employability and technical skills, as many of these data are beyond both the capacity and resources of schools to measure and collect well.

These School Performance Reports, as outlined in New Jersey's ESEA flexibility request, were developed with the input of stakeholders across the state and provide a significant amount of new data to present a more complete picture of school performance, with the ultimate aim to help schools and stakeholders engage in local goal setting and improvement. Among others, this includes metrics at all grade levels to identify the extent to which students are demonstrating skills and behaviors indicative of college and career readiness. The Department has set statewide performance targets for these metrics, and also includes the newly defined progress targets for schools and subgroups through flexibility from ESEA.

In addition, the reports include a peer school comparison for each school in the state, comparing schools with similar grade configurations and that are educating students with similar demographic characteristics such as free/reduced lunch eligibility, limited English proficiency or special education program participation. This data provides information about how similar schools are performing to help identify strengths and areas for improvement.

Together with additional data available in NJSMART, we hope that this publication provides the opportunity to have meaningful conversations around goal setting at the school and district level for the coming year. Specifically, these reports seek to further the following additional purposes:

Focus While continuing to report a wide range of comprehensive student assessment data, the School Performance Reports focus attention on metrics that are also indicative of college and career readiness, such as chronic absenteeism in the early grades, successful completion of Algebra I prior to high school, participation in college readiness tests, and the taking of rigorous coursework in high school.

Benchmark Through the establishment of peer school and statewide rankings, the School Performance Reports will enable educators and stakeholders to engage in multiple types of benchmarking analyses. Benchmarking against similar schools and statewide outcomes is a powerful strategy for identifying school strengths and areas for improvement.

Improve The School Performance Reports identify statewide targets for multiple indicators of college and career readiness and employ student growth percentiles (SGP) to describe schoolwide student growth on PARCC tests. The use of these indicators is intended to provide opportunities for educators and stakeholders to engage in local goal setting, planning, and continuous improvement over time.

As you begin to unpack the data presented in the School Performance Report, please take into account the following caveats in your efforts to interpret the reports:

- Many of the included metrics are data collected from third-party sources, such as the College Board, ACT and the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC). NSC is the only collection of student-level postsecondary enrollment data nationwide. NSC reports that they collect data from 95% of higher education institutions across the country. However, some schools in New Jersey have been independently paying active attention to both of these data sets for several years and have reported that these data are incomplete.

Peer School Comparison Groups

Each school that receives a performance report with valid student outcome data will be grouped with approximately 30 other similar schools into a peer school comparison group. Peer schools are schools that have similar grade configurations and are educating (or held accountable for) students with similar demographic characteristics.

This peer methodology incorporates reliable and available data that helps to describe the students in the school as well as other factors such as the grade span of the school. These factors include:

- Percent of students that are economically disadvantaged, i.e., free or reduced price lunch eligible (%)
- Percent of students that are limited English proficient (%)
- Percent of students that are in special education (%)
- Grade span of the school (elementary, middle, high or vocational high school).

The peer methodology uses propensity score matching to establish the peer groups for each eligible school. Propensity score matching is an established statistical technique that helps to construct comparison groups from data observed outside of an experiment. This method identifies the best available control group (or comparison group) for each eligible school. In this case, propensity score matching will identify up to 30 peers on the basis of the indicators noted above.

The methodology is further described in the Peer School Methodology White Paper, which can be found here:

<http://www.nj.gov/education/pr/2013/PeerMethodologyWhitePaper2011-2012.pdf>.

Suppression Rules Used to Ensure Student Data Privacy

The New Jersey Department of Education is committed to ensuring that, in compliance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), student privacy is fully protected. To ensure that no student's privacy is compromised, the Department has adopted a series of data suppression rules for this report. The suppression rules can be found here:

<http://www.nj.gov/education/pr/1415/suppressionrules.html>

Academic Achievement

The Academic Achievement portion of the School Performance Report presents data from the statewide assessment programs, including the outcomes of the Partnership for the Assessment of College and Career Readiness (PARCC) assessments, the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJ ASK) science assessments, and the Biology

End-of-Course exam. The presentation of the data adheres to the ESEA Accountability rules. For all test programs, students characterized by mobility, as defined as those who were not in school for a full academic year prior to testing, have been excluded.

Many on-line resources are available to further explore and understand statewide test results, such as:

- An overview of the PARCC assessment can be found here:
<http://www.state.nj.us/education/highlights/parcc.htm>
- School and district data files for the assessment programs can be found here:
<http://www.state.nj.us/education/schools/achievement/index.html>
- Parent information for the statewide assessments can be found here:
<http://www.state.nj.us/education/assessment/parents/>

ESEA Progress and Participation Targets

As part of the ESEA Flexibility Request, the U.S. Department of Education permitted any state administering new assessments in 2014-2015 that were aligned to college and career ready standards to establish new baselines, to reset annual performance targets, and to allow its districts and schools to continue the same interventions used in the previous school year. Thus, this year's performance reports do not include Annual Progress targets related to the percentage of students who met or exceeded expectations in English Language Arts/Literacy and Math, as measured by the PARCC assessments.

However, states are required to implement high quality assessments and to assess all children in designated grades. Thus, these performance reports include the participation rate for the school and each subgroup in the school. The participation target of 95% is established by ESEA. Schools that did not meet the participation rate target of 95% for each subgroup are required to develop a locally Board of Education-approved corrective action plan.

College and Career Readiness

Algebra I

In the NJ School Performance Report, Algebra I course taking is highlighted as an indicator of college and career readiness because it remains one of the most significant early predictors that a student is capable of rigorous coursework and is on track to graduate from high school and attend post-secondary education. Montgomery County (MD) Public Schools – based on its own student-level research – includes the completion

of Algebra I with a ‘C’ or better prior to high school as one of their Seven Keys to College Readiness.¹ In part, this stems from the sequencing of math courses in the high school, as the students who take Algebra I in middle school are better positioned to take both pre-calculus and calculus coursework in high school.

However, the inclusion of Algebra I in the NJ School Performance Report should not be interpreted as a recommendation to implement an across-the-board requirement that all students should take Algebra I prior to high school. This stems from the fact that the Common Core State Standards for eighth grade math, while overlapping somewhat, are not equivalent to the Algebra I standards. While schools should continue to evaluate the readiness of each student to take Algebra I prior to high school, schools should also evaluate whether they are affording enough opportunities for students to demonstrate that they are ready to engage in Algebra I coursework prior to high school. And of course, the demonstration of student readiness should be drawn from multiple measures of a student’s work, perhaps including NJ ASK prior math scores, district-level tests or performance assessment tasks, and teacher recommendations.

The data presented in the performance report include the count of students whom the school enrolled in a class called Algebra I. These course taking data are derived from the NJSMART Course Roster collection, utilizing the School Code for the Exchange of Data (SCED) 52052, aggregating a count of students from Algebra I rosters and dividing by eighth grade enrollment. Also presented is the count of students who participated in the PARCC Algebra I assessment, in lieu of the regular grade level PARCC math assessment. Schools should work to ensure that students are assessed with the PARCC assessment that is most closely aligned with the content of their coursework.

Also presented in the performance reports is the percentage of students who received grades of “C” or better, as reported in NJSMART, and the percentage of students who met or exceeded expectations in the PARCC Algebra I assessment.

Chronic Absenteeism

For more than a decade, the federal policy context has required New Jersey and other states to calculate schoolwide and subgroup-level attendance rates. In prior years, the New Jersey Report Card reported such data faithfully. But new research has called into question the usefulness of this data primarily because, in the aggregate, schoolwide attendance rates hide very important student-level trends.

For the purpose of the NJ School Performance Report, a chronically absent student is defined as a student who is not present for 10% or more of the school year, for any reason. These data are drawn from the end-of-year NJSMART State submission. For each student, an analysis of his/her number of days present versus the number of days that it was possible to be present was conducted. Any student that was not present for at least 90% of the possible days was determined to have been chronically absent. For example,

¹ <http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/mainstory/story.aspx?id=51754>

if a student were enrolled for an entire year in a school, the number of possible days that the student could have attended would be 180 days. Thus, a student who missed 18 of those days would be classified as chronically absent. If a student transferred in mid-year, however, the possible number of days that a student could have attended would be 90 days. Thus, a mid-year transfer student who missed 9 days of school would be classified chronically absent.

The research base for paying attention to chronically absent children is emerging and growing fast. Robert Balfanz and Vaughan Byrnes, for instance, found in a nationally representative data set that chronically absent children in kindergarten demonstrated lower academic performance in first grade and that the impact was twice as great for students from low-income families. And Balfanz and Byrnes conclude that:

“Because students reared in poverty benefit the most from being in school, one of the most effective strategies for providing pathways out of poverty is to do what it takes to get these students in school every day. This alone, even without improvements in the American education system, will drive up achievement, high school graduation, and college attainment rates.”²

Schools with greater than 6% of its enrollment determined to be chronically absent are advised to begin to pay closer attention to attendance trends. Helpful resources exist for schools at www.attendanceworks.org. Such resources include sample templates for messaging the importance of attendance to families (including outreach to Spanish speaking families) and a short, self-assessment tool to guide analysis of current school efforts:

<http://www.attendanceworks.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/School-Self-Assessment-Team-Rev-June-2012.pdf>

Many school information systems (SIS) provide real-time attendance data. NJSMART also utilizes attendance data in many of its District Reports.

SAT/ACT and PSAT/PLAN Participation and Performance

The New Jersey school report card has for many years reported the percentage of students from a school that take the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and the scores attributed to students within a school. In the 2013 NJ School Performance Report, NJ introduced student participation on the ACT into its reporting of student participation in College Readiness assessments. By linking the data at a student-level, the performance report counts each student once, regardless of whether he or she participates in the SAT or ACT or both, in a school’s college readiness test participation rate.

² http://new.every1graduates.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/FINALChronicAbsenteeismReport_May16.pdf

The performance reports continue to present the percentage of students who take the SAT who score at or above the College Board’s SAT Benchmark score of 1550. Independent research conducted by the College Board found that:

“The SAT Benchmark score of 1550 is associated with a 65 percent probability of obtaining a first year GPA (FYGPA) of a B- or higher, which in turn is associated with a high likelihood of college success. Students meeting the benchmark score of 1550 were more likely to enroll in a four-year college, had higher first-year GPAs and were more likely to be retained for their second and third year than those students who did not attain the SAT benchmark.”³

Also, the NJ School Performance Report presents the percentage of 10th and 11th graders who are taking the PSAT or the ACT-PLAN during a given year. The performance report focuses on participation in these tests versus performance because in many schools the percentage of participation is low, thus not lending itself to a representative sample of student abilities.

Statewide PSAT results for NJ are presented publicly by the College Board at:
http://media.collegeboard.com/digitalServices/pdf/research/2015/NJ_15_05_02_01.pdf

Advanced Placement (AP)/International Baccalaureate (IB) and Dual Enrollment Participation and Performance

Participating and succeeding in rigorous coursework in high school is one of the strongest predictors of college readiness across years of research. Of course, there are many ways to determine that a course is rigorous. For years, the New Jersey report card has reported the number of AP classes offered by a school, the count of students in AP classes, and the number of tests taken in each AP test. In 2013, the performance reports also began to report the number of IB classes offered by a school, the count of students in IB classes, and the number of tests taken in each IB test. Although any class in a high school can certainly be offered at a comparable level of rigor as AP/IB classes, it is not possible for NJDOE to differentiate amongst classes given the data that it has from the NJSMART Course Roster collection. So the NJ School Performance Report relies on the designation that a course is an AP or IB course within the School Codes for the Exchange of Data (SCED).

For the first time, the NJDOE has also included data related to the percentage of students reported as participating in dual enrollment courses. Dual enrollment is a program that allows high school students (usually sophomores, juniors, and seniors) to enroll in college courses for credit prior to high school graduation.

³ <http://media.collegeboard.com/homeOrg/content/pdf/sat-report-college-career-readiness-2013.pdf>

As mentioned, research about the strength of the relationship between taking rigorous coursework and readiness for college and college degree completion has long been prevalent. A good overview of the research base was written by Von Secker and Liu from Montgomery County Public Schools and can be found here:

http://www.studentclearinghouse.org/high_schools/files/STHS_MCPS%20APEXamAsKeyToPostsecondarySuccess.pdf

AP tests consist of five performance levels: Level 1 - No recommendation, Level 2 - Possibly qualified, Level 3 - Qualified, Level 4 - Well qualified, and Level 5- Extremely well qualified. Based on the strength of AP coursework as a predictor, Montgomery County Public Schools has identified the attainment of an AP exam score of 3 or higher as one of its Seven Keys to College Readiness.

As part of the NJ School Performance Report, AP/IB participation and performance is presented in several ways. The Performance Report presents course and test taking in every AP/IB course offering in a high school, as mentioned above. However, the Performance Report also takes the analysis one step further by seeking to present how prevalent AP/IB participation is across the school. In prior years, for example, the report card presented data in such a way where it was impossible to know if the 100 tests being reported in a building were taken by 50 students who each took two tests, 100 students who took one test, or 10 students who took 10 tests.

By using the NJSMART Course Roster submission, the NJ School Performance Report is able to address the previous limitation by analyzing course taking at a student-level and distilling the data to a set of ‘unique’ or unduplicated list of students taking AP/IB courses. Further, in order to draw meaningful comparisons across high schools that weren’t unduly influenced by the size of the student body, this analysis was then limited to AP/IB courses in English, math, social studies and science as they are common across the schools in New Jersey.⁴

Thus, as part of the metric of college and career readiness, the percentage of students who are enrolled in at least one AP/IB course in English, math, social studies and science is presented as part of the NJ School Performance Report. These data are drawn from the NJSMART course roster collection, distilled into a unique headcount and then divided by the 11th and 12th grade enrollment in the school. (Note: students who take AP/IB courses prior to 11th grade are included in the headcount.) The results of the tests associated with these AP/IB courses in English, math, social studies and science are also presented.

The focus placed on student enrollment in rigorous coursework should not be read as a recommendation that all students be ‘pushed’ into AP/IB coursework. After careful analysis of the current course taking data across New Jersey, the NJ School Performance Report sets a statewide target of 35% of 11th and 12th graders taking AP/IB tests. Again,

⁴ The following SCED codes are counted as English, math, social studies and science courses in AP or IB coursework: 01005, 01006, 02124, 02125, 03056, 03106, 03155, 03156, 03163, 03164, 03165, 03166, 03207, 04056, 04057, 04104, 04157, 04158, 01007, 02131, 02132, 03057, 03107, 03157, 03208, and 04054.

decisions about whether a student is demonstrating readiness should be made based on multiple measures of prior student work and achievement. However, limited studies have also indicated that in some school districts across the country that students who could have succeeded in rigorous courses are not identified as such. The College Board's own research indicates that PSAT scores can be reliably used as a predictor of success in AP coursework and have provided a tool for educators to use here:

<https://appotential.collegeboard.org/app/loginGetAction.do>

Participation in Visual and Performing Art Classes

Since 1996, the visual and performing arts (Dance, Drama/Theater, Music and Visual Arts) have been a part of the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards and are part of the state's graduation requirements. Beyond being requirements, research regarding the educational benefit of the arts for all New Jersey students is compelling. Various studies have identified links between involvement in the visual and performing arts and improved attendance, school engagement, academic performance, and higher levels of postsecondary attendance. Just as important, the arts provide important life skills including problem solving, critical thinking, creativity and collaboration. In a recent article, Harvard University President Drew Faust and musician Wynton Marsalis noted:

“Learning to play or paint, dance, sing or act, means constantly being refashioned, constantly demanding risk....and dealing with one's inevitable mistakes is also part of an artist's education...Let's instead look to the longer run as we teach our children how to practice until it hurts, to bravely take the stage, to imagine, create and innovate and – after hitting that wrong note – follow it up with the right one.”⁵

In 2013, the New Jersey School Performance Reports began to include measures of participation in this important curricular area in the high school performance reports. This year, the school performance reports for middle school now also include this data. Utilizing data that schools report in the NJSMART Course collection, the reports present a unique ‘headcount’ rate of participation in each of the four areas, followed by a participation rate in any visual and performing arts class.

The participation rate is calculated by summing the count of unique students taking a course in the area and dividing it by the high school's enrollment.

Participation in Career and Technical Education Programs

Participation in Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs was included in the School Performance Reports for the first time in 2014. CTE provides students with opportunities to attain academic, technical and professional skills that are essential for success in 21st Century careers. Through authentic learning experiences, informed by

⁵ <http://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2013/12/31/arts-education-music-faust-marsalis-column/4267705/>

standards and expectations of business and industry, CTE programs enhance students' career readiness and options for the future.

The CTE participation rate on the performance reports captures the percentage of all high school students who completed at least one course in any NJDOE-approved program during the last school year. An approved CTE program must include a coherent sequence of at least three courses aligned to academic and technical standards. Students enrolled in CTE programs may also earn industry-recognized credentials and/or college credit for specific courses.

This year, the performance reports also now include information about the percentage of students who are participating in Structured Learning Experiences (SLE) as part of collaboration between the school and the workforce. SLE activities are related to a formal learning plan for each student with specific learning objectives and are supervised by the participating school.

Student Growth

The NJ School Performance Reports present data about schoolwide student growth utilizing the student growth percentile (SGP) methodology. SGP has been adopted by states across the country as a way to measure student growth year over year in a way that accounts for 'starting gate' inequalities. By comparing a student's achievement outcomes to a group of students that had similar achievement in the prior year(s), it is possible to measure how much growth a student demonstrated relative to students with a similar test score history or academic peer group.

The methodology begins by grouping students together based on test scores in the prior year(s) with students across the state. In this way, many academic peer groups are formed. Then, in the next year, a student's test score is compared to those scores of their academic peer group. The SGP score is a percentile rank that demonstrates what percentage of the academic peer group a student performed higher than.

To arrive at a measure of schoolwide growth, all student growth scores in either Language Arts or Math are ranked from highest to lowest. The median growth score is determined to then represent the schoolwide growth in either Language Arts or Math.

An example of an interpretation is as follows: A schoolwide growth score of 35 in Language Arts means that the median student's growth in language arts in the school was 35. The median is the point where about half of the students in the school fall above and half fall below. A school is deemed to be making low growth if the growth score is below 35, typical growth if a score is between 35 and 65 and high growth if the score is greater than 65.

Schools are encouraged to look closely at providing supports and interventions for students that are both not meeting/exceeding expectations and demonstrating low growth

but should also seek to further explore causes of low growth for any student regardless of proficiency levels. These students can be identified in the Growth Profiles in the NJSMART District Reports.

Further documentation and a video explaining the methodology can be found at:

<http://www.state.nj.us/education/njsmart/performance/>

Graduation and Post-Secondary Enrollment

Graduation Rate

The School Performance Report presents a high school's 4-year and 5-year adjusted cohort graduation rates, utilizing the federally -mandated formula. For a fuller explanation of the methodology, please see:

<http://www.state.nj.us/education/njsmart/performance/>

The graduation rate is calculated from student-level data submitted by districts through NJSMART. Each district is given the opportunity to appeal the accuracy of this data through NJSMART during the submission process at a student-level. The rate is determined by taking into account the number of students who graduate within 4 years (or 5 years for the 5-year rate) who also started high school four years earlier. The calculation is adjusted for students who are verified transfers out of the district or who are otherwise excluded from the count. The statewide performance target for schoolwide graduation was set in NJ's ESEA flexibility request at 75%.

The 'pathway' that a student took toward graduation is also presented. A student who graduated via the High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA)⁶ is defined as a student who demonstrated proficiency on both Language Arts Literacy and Mathematics on any of the three opportunities that students are afforded to take the test. For example, a HSPA pathway rate of 80% means that 80% of the students who graduated in 2012 achieved a scale score of at least 200 on both sections of the HSPA during the test administration periods in the Spring 2011, Fall 2012 or Spring 2012. The pathway category of "Other" contains students who demonstrated proficiency through an alternative pathway(s), such as the following:

- A student who achieves a 200 scale score in one section of HSPA and demonstrates proficiency via the Alternative High School Assessment (AHSA) in the other.
- A student who demonstrates proficiency via AHSA in both Language Arts and Math.
- A student who demonstrates proficiency via AHSA in one subject and demonstrates alternative competencies via the NJDOE appeal process.

⁶ Students in the class of 2015 participated in the HSPA assessment during school year 2013-2014 and did not participate in the PARCC assessments.

- A student who demonstrates proficiency across several administrations of HSPA by scoring above the ‘just proficient mean’ in each cluster within a subject area.

The “Exempt” category includes students who were determined to be exempt from passing HSPA by educators and professionals at the school.

Post-Secondary Enrollment

The inclusion of post-secondary enrollment in the School Performance Report fulfills a federal reporting requirement under the Stimulus Act. These data reflect the percentage of the 2014 high school graduation class that was enrolled in post-secondary institutions across the United States in October 2015. The data are pulled from the National Student Clearinghouse. As mentioned above, while the NSC collects data from 95% of post-secondary institutions nationwide, some NJ educators have determined that the data are incomplete. For instance, students who enroll in post-secondary institutions outside of the United States are not included. In the Performance reports, enrollment in postsecondary is further characterized by whether students are enrolled in a two-year versus a four-year institution.

NJSMART District Reports now contain post-secondary enrollment data at a student-level, allowing educators to answer questions about which of their students are enrolled in higher education institutions and what their shared characteristics were when they were in high school. Understanding what the common characteristics are of students enrolled in post-secondary institutions will allow individual high schools to then construct their own metrics of college readiness from school-based data (akin to the Seven Key research conducted by Montgomery County Public Schools), and could include other metrics such as enrollment in subjects such as Arts and Music courses, grades in freshmen courses, engagement in mentoring programs, and participation in extra-curricular activities.