

**RESOLUTION OF THE HOPEWELL VALLEY REGIONAL
BOARD OF EDUCATION
CONCERNING CHANGES TO GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS**

WHEREAS, as Members of the Hopewell Valley Regional School District Board of Education who are entrusted with ensuring that the students of our district graduate with the requisite college and career readiness skills, we are deeply concerned with the recent changes to the graduation requirements.

WHEREAS, New Jersey (“NJ”) is transitioning to a new assessment system with new state tests known as the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (“PARCC”) Assessments; and

WHEREAS, the New Jersey Department of Education (“NJDOE”) has replaced the High School Proficiency Assessment (“HSPA”), which had passing rates of 80-90%, with PARCC Assessments that less than half of all NJ high school seniors have passed; and

WHEREAS, the NJDOE failed to adequately inform students and parents about the potential consequences for graduation when the PARCC Assessments were given in Spring 2015; and

WHEREAS, beginning with the class of 2016, the NJDOE has proposed new high school graduation requirements that rely heavily on PARCC, before the validity and reliability of those assessments have been established; and

WHEREAS, NJ is the only state in the nation using the new PARCC Assessments as a graduation exit test; and

WHEREAS, the NJDOE has eliminated the Alternative High School Assessment (“AHSA”), previously used to satisfy state standards by thousands of students unable to pass the HSPA, including many of the State’s English Language Learner (“ELL”) graduates; and

WHEREAS, over 50,000 seniors in the class of 2016 who did not pass the PARCC Assessments must now access the NJDOE’s other “options” in order to graduate this June, requiring districts to devote valuable staff time and resources to help students meet these new requirements through even more tests and a time-consuming new graduation appeals process; and

WHEREAS, some of the “options” authorized by the NJDOE for class of 2016 seniors who did not pass the PARCC Assessments include the Scholastic Aptitude Test (“SAT”) and the American College Test (“ACT”), which tests require fees, thereby denying equal access to public school students throughout NJ; and

WHEREAS, some of these “options”, such as the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) and Accuplacer, are not aligned with state curriculum standards; and

WHEREAS, all of the NJDOE’s designated “substitute assessments” are “English only” tests that do not provide appropriate accommodation for ELL students; and

WHEREAS, the NJDOE and the State Board of Education (“SBOE”) have not yet legally adopted the regulations required to implement the proposed new graduation policies, and none of the additional “options” proposed by the NJDOE as alternative ways to satisfy the new graduation requirements are

authorized by the current assessment regulations, so these new policies cannot fairly or legally be imposed on current seniors who are entitled to graduate under the rules that have been in place throughout their high school careers and that remain in effect today; and

WHEREAS, legal issues arising from the NJDOE's graduation proposals have led to a court challenge by parents represented by the Education Law Center and the American Civil Liberties Union of NJ ("ACLU-NJ"), and these issues could expose district boards of education to legal challenges by students denied diplomas on the basis of improperly imposed new graduation rules; and

WHEREAS, these policies have neither firm legal footing nor the public understanding, support, and awareness needed for such a dramatic shift in high school graduation standards; and

WHEREAS, beginning with the class of 2021, the NJDOE has proposed requiring students to pass the PARCC ELA10 and Alg I Assessments in order to graduate, despite the fact that the current passing rates on those tests are 37% and 36% respectively; and

WHEREAS, beginning with the class of 2020, the NJDOE has further proposed additional regulations that would deny parents the right to opt their children out of PARCC Assessments, making it impossible for students who opted out of the PARCC Assessments to graduate high school; and

WHEREAS, the Department is proposing to eliminate all other testing options besides PARCC as ways to satisfy state graduation requirements; and

WHEREAS, the New Jersey High School Graduation Act ("the Act") requires an 11th grade test in math and ELA with retesting opportunities for seniors in 12th grade, and the PARCC end of course exams do not conform to the requirements of the Act; and

WHEREAS, NJ has had four graduation tests since the Act was passed in 1979 and has never attached diploma stakes to a new test after a single administration; and

WHEREAS, the Governor's own College and Career Ready Task Force recommended a multi-year transition to a new state assessment system during which "the Department of Education will not establish a minimum passing score as a graduation requirement," recommending instead that "graduation will be dependent on satisfactory completion of the required courses, as established by local boards of education"; and

WHEREAS, the new graduation requirements proposed by the NJDOE do not conform to the recommendations of the Governor's College and Career Ready Task Force;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the **Hopewell Valley Regional School District Board of Education** ("the Board") hereby:

(1) Urges the NJDOE to withdraw its pending graduation requirement proposals from consideration before the SBOE; and

(2) Urges the NJDOE to implement the recommendation of the Governor's College and Career Ready Task Force, including a multi-year transition to a new assessment system that does "not establish a minimum passing score as a graduation requirement" on the new PARCC Assessments; and

- (3) Urges the legislature and the SBOE to take the necessary steps to implement this recommendation and allow students to graduate during this multi-year transition period on the basis of credits earned, grade point averages, and successful completion of all attendance, service, and other local graduation requirements; and
- (4) Urges that this multi-year transition to a new assessment system be used to conduct a broad public dialogue among all stakeholders to develop a new consensus around the transparent and equitable assessment policies all our students deserve; and
- (5) Urges that NJ continues to provide multiple pathways to a high school diploma that include alternatives not based on standardized tests, and that it continues to respect the right of parents to make decisions about the assessment alternatives that are most appropriate for their children; and
- (6) Urges that the legislature review/hold hearings on the impact of the Department's proposed graduation rules on the class of 2016; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this resolution be certified and submitted to our State Representatives, the New Jersey School Boards Association, local municipal leaders, the board secretaries of each school district in the county, the County Office of Education, and the Office of the Commissioner of Education.