

NJ School Performance Reports – Interpretive Guide

**New Jersey Department of Education
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I am deeply grateful to many individuals and organizations across New Jersey for their insight and expertise in helping to shape the New Jersey School Performance Reports.

A workgroup representing superintendents, principals, teachers, school board members, and parents met with me over several months to discuss ideas relating to the composition of the peer school comparison groups, the presentation of data, and how data influence behavior. They were patient as I drew various distributions of data for hours across white boards. Learning about the ways that they understood and had used data in their various roles across their careers enriched this work. While we generally worked to generate a consensus point of view and the performance report was informed by these discussions to a significant degree, it would not be fair to say that the performance report is the document that any single member of the workgroup would have created if they had had the opportunity.

I have also had the great fortune to engage in conversations with educators and stakeholders across New Jersey via county curriculum coordinator meetings, superintendent roundtables, email exchanges and conferences hosted by many of our professional associations. Listening and taking in the range of frustrations, questions, and concerns about how data are often misused and have in limited cases led to less desirable outcomes for students has greatly influenced this work. Many of those concerns have been explicitly addressed in decisions about what data to include, the formation of peer school groupings, and the shape and feel of the NJ School Performance Reports.

I am deeply indebted also to the work of the NJSMAART points of contact in each school district. Their hard work has made possible the kinds of analyses found within the NJ School Performance Report. It has been a mammoth undertaking of ours to move NJSMAART from a repository of ‘mandated’ data collections to a system that serves the data needs of educators. The last two years in particular have seen a flurry of activity needed to meet federal obligations under the Stimulus Act – akin to a running a marathon at a 5K pace! But those efforts are now paying off in allowing educators to use data, at a student-level, to design specific interventions and supports for students. To the submitters of data in districts, I want to offer a special thank you. As you’ll see in the NJ School Performance Report so much of what we present begins with what you submit... we couldn’t do this without you.

None of this would have been possible without the work of state department staff who work tirelessly with districts to help them provide data, think through implications posed by the unique configurations of our schools and districts, provide sophisticated analyses to uncover errors, work together to manage technical challenges, and display an unrelenting commitment to providing high-quality data that can be used to improve student outcomes. To staff both inside and outside of the Performance Division at NJDOE and at NJSMAART, I am very grateful.

Lastly, I am thankful for the support in this endeavor of my senior colleagues at NJDOE and Commissioner Chris Cerf. The impetus to revise our data reporting stemmed from a ‘challenge’ issued to me by Commissioner Cerf almost two years ago. Very simply, he asked, “How can our data reporting further the NJDOE mission that all students, regardless of birth circumstances, graduate from high school ready for college and careers?”

Bari Anhalt Erlichson, Ph.D.
Chief Performance Officer
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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 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.

And 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. The reports seek to spur the kinds of discussions that educators engage in every day about students in evaluating current performance and planning for improvement: "Her classroom participation is about average, several quizzes were good but several weren't, the unit assessment was strong, and she doesn't consistently turn in her homework on time."¹

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 Reports 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.

The new School Performance Reports, as outlined in New Jersey's NCLB 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

¹ And of course, moving from these data observations to action would then require the formation of a hypothesis: "Given that her unit assessment is strong, she is clearly capable of achieving at a high level. But I think that this student's inconsistent preparation for class is inhibiting her performance overall." And then to a plan of action: "I will speak to her about the ways in which doing her homework and being prepared would enable her classroom participation to improve and would also impact her quizzes.... And may even reduce the stress that she probably feels in preparing for the unit assessments!"

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 NCLB.

In addition, the reports include, for the first time, 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 to district-designated users, 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 for the first time employ student growth percentiles (SGP) to describe schoolwide student growth on NJ ASK 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 first-year data, meaning that 2011-2012 was the first year that NJDOE collected the data and/or are presenting it for publication. Examples of such metrics include chronic absenteeism, Algebra I prior to high school, and an unduplicated rate of student participation in AP course taking. Each of these metrics is drawn from new NJSMART submissions during the 2011-2012 school year. While NJSMART has a nearly 100% participation rate and a very low error rate, data collected in a first-year collection are often of lower quality than that collected in subsequent years.

- Many of the included metrics are data collected from third-party sources, such as the College Board and the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC). NSC is the only collection of student-level post-secondary 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.
- Student outcome data is not always normally distributed. For example, results on the HSPA exam are significantly skewed as statewide proficiency rates top 93% in LAL and 83% in math, making both peer group comparisons and statewide rankings less meaningful for those schools with very high proficiency rates.

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 indicators 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 use 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.

Academic Achievement

The Academic Achievement portion of the School Performance Report presents data from the statewide assessment programs, including the outcomes of the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJ ASK), the High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA), and the Biology End-of-Course exam. The presentation of the data adheres to the NCLB 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. Furthermore, the HSPA data is for the graduating cohort of 2012 and is aggregated from the test administrations from Spring 2011, Fall 2011, and Spring 2012 (the so-called “Banked” data).

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

- School and district data files for the assessment programs can be found here: <http://www.state.nj.us/education/schools/achievement/index.html>
- The NJASK score interpretation manual can be found here: <http://www.state.nj.us/education/assessment/ms/5-8/ref/SIM12.pdf>
- Parent guides to the statewide assessments can be found here: <http://www.state.nj.us/education/assessment/parents/>

NCLB Progress Targets

The NCLB Progress Targets are calculated under the federally proscribed methodology in New Jersey’s ESEA Flexibility Application. “Option A” for calculating Annual Measurable Objectives (AMO) sets yearly progress targets by using 2011 assessment data as baseline. Yearly progress targets are established to measure whether each school and subgroup is making progress toward the goal of halving the distance between their baseline and 100% proficiency by 2017. A more detailed explanation of the AMO methodology can be found beginning on p. 42 of New Jersey’s Approved Flexibility Request: <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/eseaflex/approved-requests/nj.pdf>

As the 2011 data for each school and subgroup form the baseline for the measurement of progress, the target of the percentage of students who are expected to reach proficiency by 2017 is by definition different for each subgroup and school. These targets represent ambitious but achievable rates of progress for increasing proficiency for each school and subgroup by 2017 and should be used by schools and stakeholder as a way to reflect on whether sufficient progress has been made from year to year.

Some stakeholders might interpret the varying progress targets as meaning that different or lower aspirations have been set for different subgroups across the state. In fact, our aspiration is for **all** students to graduate from high school ready for college and careers. Progress targets instead represent a way to take into account the proficiency level at which schools began in 2011, compel those schools that are further behind to show greater progress, and require all schools across the state to mark and support the progress of all subgroups of students in their schools.

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.² 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 as the Common Core State Standards for eighth grade math, while overlapping somewhat, are not equivalent to the Algebra I standards. So, after an analysis of current Algebra I course taking data, the NJ School Performance Report establishes a performance target for course enrollment of 20% of seventh and eighth graders.³ 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 who can 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.

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 seventh and eighth grade enrollment.

In New Jersey, the successful completion of Algebra I became a high school graduation requirement for all students in the graduating cohort of 2012, i.e., students who began ninth grade in 2008-2009. The successful completion of Geometry is first required as a graduation requirement for the graduating cohort of 2014.

Beginning in 2014-2015, New Jersey will implement new tests as part of the Partnership for the Assessment of College and Career Readiness (PARCC) to replace the current NJ High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA). The PARCC tests will include three end-of-course tests in mathematics: Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II.

Research from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) recently released High School Transcript Study⁴ found that, while many schools are offering courses entitled “Algebra I,” the content of such courses varies dramatically – and that “Course Title Inflation” for both Algebra I and Geometry was often occurring. New Jersey schools are encouraged to prepare for the implementation of PARCC exams by working to align current math classes closely with the Common Core standards. Additionally,

² <http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/info/keys/>

³ Although most students who take Algebra I in middle school do so in eighth grade, a full 15% do so either in sixth or seventh grade. Additionally, some middle schools offer advanced students an opportunity to take either Geometry and/or Algebra II prior to middle school; that course enrollment is not reflected in the Algebra I data.

⁴ http://www.edweek.org/media/26math-mcs_report_final.pdf

PARCC has provided Model Content Frameworks for these classes that may be of use to curriculum supervisors, found here: <http://www.parcconline.org/parcc-model-content-frameworks>

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% 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, 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.”⁵

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:

⁵ https://getschooled.com/system/assets/assets/152/original/FINALChronicAbsenteeismReport_May16_executivesummary_withcover_20_1_.pdf?1337209810

<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 and PSAT Participation and Performance⁶

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 NJ School Performance Report, several new features have been introduced to further enhance our usage of this data. First, NJ is introducing a measure of 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.”⁷

Also, the NJ School Performance Report presents the percentage of 10th and 11th graders who are taking the PSAT during a given year. The performance report focuses on participation in PSAT tests versus performance because in many schools the percentage of participation is low, thus not lending itself to a representative sample of student abilities. But, participation in PSAT testing provides a powerful and perhaps first signal to school counselors and educators that a student is actively thinking of being college-bound. And also, perhaps even more importantly through an absence of a PSAT score, that they have not yet begun to think of themselves as college bound. Counselors can use NJSMART to download the PSAT testing data at a student-level and look for students who lack such scores but are demonstrating academic success in other areas, such as NJ ASK testing histories, a high freshman year GPA, and a pattern of rigorous coursework.

Statewide PSAT results for NJ are presented publicly by the College Board at:

http://media.collegeboard.com/digitalServices/pdf/research/NJ_13_05_02_01.pdf

⁶ These data are drawn from data files provided to NJDOE by the College Board. Some school districts independently offer the PSAT to their students and thus their student data are not processed by the College Board and cannot be included in the performance reports.

⁷ <http://press.collegeboard.org/sat/sat-college-and-career-readiness-benchmark>

NJDOE is also investigating the inclusion of ACT participation and performance for inclusion in the next iteration of the School Performance Reports.

Advanced Placement (AP) 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. Additionally, the report card also presented the percentage of tests taken each year that were attributed to students in the building that scored a 3 or higher. Although any class in a high school can certainly be offered at a comparable level of rigor as AP 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 course within the School Codes for the Exchange of Data (SCED). For future years, NJDOE is exploring the inclusion of International Baccalaureate (IB) and Dual Enrollment courses in the NJ School Performance Report as well.

As mentioned, research about the strength of the relationship between taking Advanced Placement 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

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 high as one of its Seven Keys to College Readiness.

As part of the NJ School Performance Report, AP participation and performance is presented in several ways. The Performance Report continues to present AP course and test taking in every AP course offering in a school, as mentioned above. However, the Performance Report also takes the analysis one step further by seeking to present how prevalent AP 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 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 ten

AP courses in English, math, social studies and science as they are common across the schools in New Jersey.⁸

Thus, as part of the metric of college and career readiness, the percentage of students who are enrolled in at least one AP 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 courses prior to 11th grade are included in the headcount.) The results of the tests associated with these ten AP courses 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 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 coursework. Again, decisions about whether a student is demonstrating readiness should be 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>

Student Growth

The 2012 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.

⁸ The ten AP courses that are included are English Language (SCED 01005), English Literature (SCED 01006), Calculus AB (SCED 02124), Calculus BC (SCED 02125), Biology (SCED 03056), Chemistry (SCED 03106), Physics B (SCED 03155), European History (SCED 04056), U.S. History (SCED 04104), and U.S. Government and Politics (SCED 04157).

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 partially proficient 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 NJ ASK 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 NCLB-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 HSPA 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.
- 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 2011 high school graduation class that was enrolled in post-secondary institutions across the United States in October 2012. 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.

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.