



**TO:** P-12 Education Committee

**FROM:** Elizabeth R. Berlin *Elizabeth R Berlin*

**SUBJECT:** Workgroup on Common Core Regents Exams (Algebra I and others)

**DATE:** September 9, 2015

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## SUMMARY

### Issue for Discussion

Does the Board wish to direct Department staff to convene a workgroup to advise on technical and policy aspects of the Common Core Regents Exams?

### Background Information

In fall 2013, Department staff recommended to the Board that the Common Core Regents Exams, to be first administered in June 2014, maintain a partial proficiency cut score (Level 3 – Partially Meets Common Core Expectations, i.e., Regents Diploma Level) to meet current graduation requirements and aspirational proficiency (Level 4 – Meets Common Core Expectations) and mastery (Level 5 – Exceeds Common Core Expectations) cut scores for future graduation requirements. At its November 2014 meeting, the Board adopted regulatory amendments, effective December 3, 2014, to implement this recommendation.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.regents.nysed.gov/common/regents/files/1114brca2.pdf>.

<b><u>Performance Levels on Common Core Regents Exams</u></b>
<b>Level 5: Exceeds Common Core expectations</b>
<b>Level 4: Meets Common Core expectations (First required for Regents Diploma purposes with the Class of 2022)</b>
<b>Level 3: Partially meets Common Core expectations (Required for current Regents Diploma purposes. We expect comparable percentages of students to attain Level 3 or above as do students who pass current Regents Exams (2005 Standards) with a score of 65 or above)</b>
<b>Level 2 (Safety Net): Partially meets Common Core expectations (Required for Local Diploma purposes. We expect comparable percentages of students to attain Level 2 or above as do students who pass current Regents Exams (2005 Standards) with a score of 55 or above)</b>
<b>Level 1: Does not demonstrate Knowledge and Skills for Level 2</b>

In addition, staff informed the Board that best practice when introducing new tests that measure new performance levels on new standards, such as for the Common Core Regents Exams (including Algebra I), is to use a new reporting scale (e.g., 720 to 970) because scores on the old exam are not comparable to the scores on the new exam.<sup>2</sup> Staff also informed the Board that if so many fixed constraints were maintained with the new exams (the familiar scale from 0 to 100 and the familiar cut scores of 55, 65, and 85), there could be a negative impact on the technical features of the new exams and, consequently, educators' ability to interpret and use scores.

In winter 2014, the Board approved the recommendation to establish different passing scores for future graduation purposes, but directed Department staff to continue the use of the same 0 to 100 scale, largely in response to a strong field demand that familiar aspects of the old Regents Exams remain in place (e.g., the same 0 to 100 scale, the same 55, 65 and 85 cut scores). This approach was formally adopted by the Board in February 2014.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.regents.nysed.gov/common/regents/files/1013p12d4%5B1%5D.pdf> and <http://www.regents.nysed.gov/common/regents/files/CommonCoreRegentsExams%5B1%5D.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> See [http://www.regents.nysed.gov/common/regents/files/214p12d4%5B1%5D\\_0.pdf](http://www.regents.nysed.gov/common/regents/files/214p12d4%5B1%5D_0.pdf), [http://www.regents.nysed.gov/common/regents/files/214p12d5%5B1%5D\\_0.pdf](http://www.regents.nysed.gov/common/regents/files/214p12d5%5B1%5D_0.pdf)

Under current Board policy, the class of 2022 (i.e., students who first enter grade nine in the 2018-19 school year) is the first group of students required to pass the Common Core Regents Exams at the proficiency level (Level 4 – Meets Common Core Expectations). Prior to the class of 2022, students need only pass the exams for graduation purposes at the partial proficiency level (Level 3 – Partially Meets Common Core Expectations, i.e., Regents Diploma level), with additional safety net provisions for students with disabilities. Because only about 26% of students currently pass the Common Core Algebra 1 Exam at the proficiency level (Level 4) or above, for example, improvement in this area will need to be a significant focus statewide in order to prepare students for these more rigorous graduation requirements as we approach the 2021-22 school year.

In addition, to provide a transition to the Common Core, the Board approved changes in Commissioner’s Regulations whereby certain students who receive instruction in the new standards would, during the initial administrations of the new Regents Exams and at local discretion, be able to take the old test in addition to the new test and meet graduation requirements by passing either test.<sup>4</sup> These provisions have expired for Algebra I, Geometry and English Language Arts and are currently under consideration by the Board of Regents for Algebra II.

#### First Administration of Common Core Regents Exams

The first administrations of the Common Core Regents Exams occurred in June 2014 (in English Language Arts and in Algebra I). As with all Regents Exams, these exams were developed by the Department’s Office of State Assessment and New York State content-certified teachers based on collaboratively developed test specifications. New York State teachers are directly involved in all aspects of the test development process, including question development and review, the determination of which questions will be included on the final test forms, and construction of the scoring materials.<sup>5</sup>

In June 2014, cut scores for each of the five performance levels on the Common Core Regents Exams were recommended to the Commissioner by a statewide representative panel of educators through a formal, research-based process known as standard setting; these cuts were subsequently approved by the Board of Regents.<sup>6</sup>

In order to implement Board policy, the Department placed two constraints on this standard setting process. These constraints ensured that the percentage of

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<http://www.p12.nysed.gov/assessment/commoncore/cclsassessments.pdf>, and <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/assessment/commoncore/updateccregentsexams-514.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/assessment/commoncore/transitionccregents1113rev.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> The application for teacher participation opportunities may be found at <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/assessment/teacher/home.html#teacher-op>. In addition, the public may share feedback on any of the Regents Exams through the online evaluation form available at <http://www.forms2.nysed.gov/emsc/osa/exameval/reexameval.cfm>.

<sup>6</sup> See <http://www.regents.nysed.gov/common/regents/files/PerformanceStandards.pdf>.

students at Performance Levels 2 and 3 remained comparable to the percentage of students who passed at a score of 55 and 65, respectively, on prior-year Regents Exams that measured student achievement on the prior (2005) New York State Learning Standards. This constraint ensured that students retain access to a high school diploma as we continue to phase-in the Common Core expectations, which will be fully implemented for purposes of graduation requirements starting with the class of 2022. All other standard setting performance level recommendations (Level 4 and Level 5) were informed solely by educator judgment and the rigor required by the standards.<sup>7</sup>

### June 2015 Administration of Algebra I

Following the June 2015 administration, the Department has received questions about three aspects of the Common Core Regents Exam in Algebra I: (1) questions about the low percentage of students who achieved at Level 4 (Meets Common Core Expectations) and Level 5 (Exceeds Common Core Expectations); (2) questions about the conversion chart, in which students need many fewer raw score points for the Level 2 (Partially Meets Common Core Expectations, i.e., Local Diploma Level) and Level 3 (Partially Meets Common Core Expectations, i.e., Regents Diploma Level) and many more raw score points for Levels 4 and 5; and (3) concerns that college personnel will be confused by the changes in the test when they review information on student transcripts.

The lower percentage of students scoring at Level 4 and above, as compared to past student performance on the Regents Exam in Integrated Algebra, is a direct result of implementing higher learning standards. We need to continue the work to help students achieve at these college- and career-readiness levels.

The technical concerns from the field arise from the fact that, in response to field feedback, the Department has simultaneously maintained during the transition the percent of students who have historically passed the old Regents Exam for graduation purposes (Level 2 and 3); set aspirational targets for college readiness (Level 4 and 5); and maintained the familiar features of the old exams (a scale of 0 to 100 with familiar cut points for 55, 65, and 85).

When learning standards and the tests that measure student progress on new standards are changed, best practice involves a change to the scale of the test so everyone understands that new scores on the new tests are not directly comparable to the old scores on the old tests. In addition, the only viable way to address the concerns

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<sup>7</sup> These performance standards are maintained from year to year on subsequent versions of the test through a standard and common process called equating, where slight differences in the difficulty level of a test from year to year are addressed through slight adjustments in the raw score required to earn the performance standard. In other words, if a current-year test is slightly more difficult than the prior-year test, the raw score necessary to achieve the performance standard on the current-year test would be slightly lower than it was on the prior-year test; similarly, if a current-year test is slightly less difficult than the prior-year test, the raw score necessary to achieve the performance standard on the current-year test would be slightly higher than it was on the prior-year test.

voiced over the conversion chart is to spread out the scale and let the current constraints – the cut scores associated with Level 2, Level 3 and Level 5 – fall on a new scale in a more continuous fashion.

### **Recommendation**

In light of these concerns, Department staff recommend that the Board of Regents direct staff to convene a group of educators to consider and advise on the technical and policy issues described above, including whether a new scale should be adopted to address the concerns about the conversion chart and transcript review by college personnel.