

MEMORANDUM

DATE: May 18, 2009

TO: All Members of the Delaware State Senate
and House of Representatives

FROM: Ms. Daniese McMullin-Powell
Chairperson
State Council for Persons with Disabilities

RE: S.B. 68 [DSTP Replacement]

The State Council for Persons with Disabilities (SCPD) has reviewed S.B. 68 which would eliminate the DSTP and require its replacement beginning in the 2010-2011 school year. As background, consistent with the attached articles, there is widespread support to replace the current 11-year old DSTP. As indicated in the April 14 News Journal article, the new system would be a “computer-adaptive, growth model test” ...which “will bring quicker results, earlier teacher intervention and increase student motivation.” The article also notes that the new system is expected to be cheaper than the DSTP which cost the state more than \$10 million last year.

In addition, the attached April 15, 2009 Dover Post article notes that S.B. 68 is part of the Governor’s legislative package to improve the educational system. Beginning with the 2010-2011 school year, the Department would conduct assessments of students in at least grades 2-10 at least twice annually - once within 30 days of the onset of the school year and once at a time determined by the Department of Education. The alternate assessment option in current Title 14 Del.C. §151(g) is retained (lines 21-30).

The reference to “at least two annual assessments” (line 5) is significant since it appears likely that up to four (4) annual assessments are envisioned. For example, the March 5 News Journal article describes the proposed assessment system as follows:

The first is a summative test - a comprehensive, end-of-the year exam that would be used for

federal, high-stakes purposes such as school accountability ratings.

The second is a benchmark test that would be administered at the beginning, middle and end of the year for immediate feedback on how a student is doing on a particular subject. The benchmark test would adjust to the student's ability, so when a child is struggling, the difficulty of the questions decreases and when the student is excelling, the computer system switches to harder questions.

The April 14 News Journal article presents a similar description:

The task force is seeking test-makers for two exams. The first is a comprehensive, end-of-the-year exam that would be used for federal, high-stakes purposes such as school accountability ratings. The second is a benchmark test that would be administered at the beginning, middle and end of the year for immediate feedback on how a student is doing in a particular subject.

The articles therefore suggest that 4 separate tests would be administered - a summative test and 3 benchmark tests. This is much more "robust" assessment system than the DSTP.

SCPD endorses the proposed legislation and has the following observation.

It would be preferable to substitute "shall" for "may" in line 21. This would clarify that districts must have an alternate assessment system in place, i.e., it is a requirement and not an option. Line 23 already affirms that the "alternate assessments must be developed and used...not later than the 2010-2011 school year" and the current law requires an operational alternate assessment system now. See Title 14 Del.C. §151(g) [requiring that alternate assessment be in place no later than July 1, 2001]. The substitution of "shall" for "may" would remove any ambiguity that the alternate assessment system is discretionary.

Thank you for your consideration and please contact SCPD if you have any questions regarding our position or observations on the proposed legislation.

cc: The Honorable Jack Markell
The Honorable Mathew Denn
Mr. Chad Robinson
Mr. Brian Hartman
Governor's Advisory Council for Exceptional Citizens
Developmental Disabilities Council

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