

**July 16, 2010**

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Assessment Directors  
Special Education Directors

**FROM:** Melissa Fincher, Associate Superintendent of Assessment and Accountability  
Nancy O'Hara, Associate Superintendent for Innovative Instruction

**SUBJECT:** Changes Impacting the 2010-2011 Grade 11 Georgia Alternate Assessment (GAA)

The purpose of this memorandum is to update you on changes in the grade 11 GAA for the upcoming school year. As you are aware, federal law requires the participation of all students, including students with disabilities, in mandated assessment programs. States are required to develop and administer an alternate assessment based on alternate achievement standards for students with significant cognitive disabilities who are unable to participate in general assessment even with maximum accommodations.

Students who enrolled in ninth grade during the 2008-2009 school year fall under State Board Rule 160-4-2-.48, commonly referred to as the Graduation Rule. Under this rule, students with significant cognitive disabilities may be eligible for a diploma once specific criteria are met. These criteria include: 1) enrollment in and successful completion of an integrated curriculum based on the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) that includes instruction in English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies via access courses as well as career preparation, self-determination, independent living and personal care (equal to 23 units of instruction); 2) participated in the GAA in middle school and high school; 3) a score of Established Progress or Extending Progress on all sections of the high school GAA; and 4) reached the 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday or transitioned to employment/training in which the supports needed are provided by an entity other than the local school system.

Additionally, the new graduation rule expanded the list of required courses. The instructional program for students with significant cognitive disabilities includes access courses that align with the general education courses associated with the End-of-Course Tests (EOCT). As a result, a committee of Georgia educators met several times during the 2009-2010 school year and, after careful consideration, recommended expanding the grade 11 GAA in the content areas of science and social studies. This ensures that content from each EOCT-assessed course is included in the grade 11 GAA portfolio. In this manner, the grade 11 GAA serves as the alternate assessment for the high school assessment program.

Changes impacting the 2010-2011 grade 11 GAA are summarized below:

- A total of 8 entries are required in grade 11.
  - Two entries will continue to be required in English Language Arts.
  - Two entries will continue to be required in Mathematics.
    - One entry must cover a standard from Mathematics I;
    - One entry must cover a standard from Mathematics II.
  - Two entries will be required in Science.
    - One entry must cover a standard from Biology;
    - One entry must cover a standard from Physical Science.
  - Two entries will be required in Social Studies.
    - One entry must cover a standard from US History;
    - One entry must cover a standard from Economics.

Students pursuing a diploma, who are assessed by the GAA and do not achieve a proficient score on one or more content areas, will be offered retest opportunities just as their general education peers are offered retest opportunities for the Georgia High School Graduation Tests (GHSGT). Retest opportunities will begin during the 2011-2012 school year. Two testing windows (winter and spring) will be offered each year, beginning in winter 2011. Students will only be required to retest in a content area in which they did not receive a proficient score (i.e., achieved a score of Emerging Progress). Importantly, only students who enrolled in ninth-grade during the 2008-2009 school year and who are seeking a diploma need retest. Students seeking a special education diploma are not required to retest.

The 2010-2011 *GAA Examiner's Manual* and the *School and System Test Coordinator's Manual* will reflect the changes outlined. Additionally, the GAA pre-administration workshops will cover this topic.

Please do not hesitate to contact Deborah Houston via phone (404-657-0251) or email ([dhouston@doe.k12.ga.us](mailto:dhouston@doe.k12.ga.us)) should you have questions regarding the GAA. Please contact Lynn Holland via phone (404-657-9960) or email ([lholland@doe.k12.ga.us](mailto:lholland@doe.k12.ga.us)) should you have questions regarding the graduation requirements for students with disabilities.

cc: System Superintendents  
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RESA Directors  
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