



# Your Guide to the New Jersey Biology Competency Test, May 2011

New Jersey Department of Education

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This pamphlet answers the most frequently asked questions about the New Jersey Biology Competency Test (NJBCT). It explains its importance to your child's education. The information describes what the test measures, why the assessment is given, how the results are reported, and why it is important for your child to do well on the assessment.

## Questions and Answers

### 1. What is the New Jersey Biology Competency Test (NJBCT)?

The NJBCT is a state test given to students to measure whether they have gained the knowledge and skills identified in the Biology section of the Science Core Curriculum Content Standards (CCCS). The CCCS, adopted by the State Board of Education, identify what students should know and be able to do at the end of various benchmark years. The NJBCT will help determine whether your child is making satisfactory progress toward mastering biology skills needed to graduate from high school. All New Jersey public high school students, regardless of grade level, who are enrolled in a first-time Biology course, or content equivalent, during the 2010–2011 school year, must take the test.

### 2. Why is my child required to pass the NJBCT?

In 1988, the New Jersey State Legislature passed a law (18A: 7C-6.2) that requires all students who graduate from a public high school in New Jersey to demonstrate mastery of skills "... needed to function politically, economically, and socially in a democratic society." These skills are defined in the Core Curriculum Content Standards in the area of Biology.

### 3. In what other ways are the test results used?

Local school districts use the results to determine

the appropriateness and strength of the local curriculum and to develop remedial programs to help students improve their knowledge and skills. The results are also used to satisfy federal requirements under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

### 4. Are children classified as special education required to take the test?

The NJBCT is designed to measure how well all high school students have mastered the Biology content standards, including students with learning disabilities. Special education students will be working to achieve the standards at levels appropriate for them and with any accommodations or modifications they may need. These accommodations are defined in their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). The accommodations or modifications should be the same as those used by these students in other classroom testing, and may include Braille, extended testing time, or a different testing site.

While most special education students will take the test, there will be a small percentage of students with the most severe disabilities for whom some of the content standards are not appropriate. The New Jersey Department of Education has identified those standards that are appropriate for students with severe disabilities. The department developed a different kind of tool to measure the achievements of special education students who are exempt from taking the NJBCT. The Alternate Proficiency Assessment (APA), was taken by students for the first time in November 2001. The portfolio assessment documents student performance in Mathematics, Language Arts Literacy, and Biology. Every student with a learning disability must take the NJBCT unless the IEP team determines that your child will participate in the APA. Parents and guardians of children with disabilities should discuss participation in the test, and any necessary accommodations, at the child's IEP meeting.

**5. Must students identified as limited English proficient (LEP) take the test?**

Yes. All limited English proficient (LEP) students must take the NJBCT. LEP students are provided accommodations and modifications during testing, which can include a translation dictionary, translation of the test directions, extended testing time, or a small group testing environment. Parents and guardians should meet with the school bilingual/ESL coordinator to discuss appropriate testing accommodations and modifications for LEP students.

**6. When is the NJBCT given?**

The test is administered in May 2011 to all New Jersey public high school students, regardless of grade level, who are enrolled in a first-time biology course during the 2010–2011 school year. It will be administered over a two-day period. Your child will spend approximately two hours each day taking the test. There will be opportunities for retesting and remedial instruction for students who do not pass the test.

**NJBCT SCHEDULE**

**May 2011**

**Regular Test Dates**

**May 17, 18, 2011**

**Make-up Test Dates**

**May 19, 20, 2011**

**7. What does the NJBCT measure?**

The NJBCT measures achievement of knowledge and skills in biology as described in the Core Curriculum Content Standards.

The NJBCT will be administered on two days, May 17 and 18, 2011. It consists of two types of questions. The first type is multiple choice, whereby students select the correct answer from four choices. The second type is performance assessment, whereby students are required to write their answers or to explain or illustrate how they

solve biology tasks. The test measures student knowledge of the following reporting clusters:

- Organization and Development
- Matter and Energy Transformation
- Interdependence
- Heredity and Reproduction
- Evolution and Diversity

**8. How is the NJBCT developed?**

Test items and performance tasks are developed and then reviewed by state-level Biology and Sensitivity committees before and after they are included in the test. New Jersey teachers and other educators participate in the committee review process. All items and tasks are subjected to a rigorous field test before they are included on the graduation test.

**9. How were the proficiency levels set?**

Proficiency levels for the NJBCT were established by experienced educators who recommended proficiency levels. With the committees' recommendations, the State Board of Education, in consultation with the Commissioner of Education, adopted the standards which established the proficiency levels. A procedure called statistical equating is used to make sure that all future scale scores are equivalent to those established for the test.

**10. How is the NJBCT scored?**

The multiple-choice questions are machine-scored by a company hired by the New Jersey Department of Education. The same company also conducts the scoring of all performance assessment tasks. The company has a staff of raters who undergo extensive training and are continuously monitored during the scoring process.

Each correct response to a multiple-choice question counts as one point; students are not penalized for guessing. The total number of points make up a score known as the raw score. The raw scores are then converted into scale scores, which are the scores that are reported. These scale scores are your child's Biology scores.

**11. How are the performance assessment tasks scored?**

The student responses to the performance assessment tasks are rated independently by two highly trained raters on a four-point rubric from 1 (lowest) to 4 (highest). A third rater is used in those rare circumstances when the two initial scores are not equal or adjacent. The ratings are then averaged and weighted by a factor of three to arrive at the final score.

**12. What types of scores and reports will I receive for the NJBCT?**

Your child will receive an Individual Student Report (ISR) that contains his or her scores in Biology. For each section of the test, there will be a total scale score, and raw scores for each reporting cluster. The total scores will be reported in one of three proficiency levels: Advanced Proficient—pass, Proficient—pass, or Partially Proficient—fail.

Scores that fall in the Partially Proficient level indicate that the student has not met the minimum level of proficiency required. A copy of the Individual Student Report must be given to you; another copy is kept at the school in your child's file. This report is available only to the student, his or her parent or legal guardian, and school personnel deemed appropriate by the Commissioner of Education.

**13. What happens if my child does not pass the NJBCT?**

Students who fail the test in May 2011 will have additional opportunities to demonstrate proficiency. The school must inform you about the additional support your child will receive.

**14. If my child passes the NJBCT and we move to another school district in New Jersey, must my child be tested again?**

No. Scores on the NJBCT become part of a student's permanent record and, therefore, the school district must forward test scores to the new school district if a student relocates. Even if a student leaves school and then later returns, he or she would not be tested on the previously passed NJBCT.

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**Your Child with an Educational Disability**

**15. Are children classified as eligible for special education and related services required to pass the NJBCT?**

The Individualized Education Program (IEP) defines the graduation requirements, including testing, for each special education student. If a child's IEP does not include a specific exemption from passing the test, then that child must pass the NJBCT as one of the requirements for a high school diploma. A student exempted from passing the NJBCT must take the exempted test once. The score on the exempted test will not affect the student's graduation status. A student with a disability may be tested through the Alternative Proficiency Assessment (APA), rather than by taking the NJBCT, if it is determined appropriate by your child's IEP team.

**16. Can accommodations or modifications be made to the testing environment to accommodate my special education child?**

Yes. Accommodations and modifications might include such aids as a Braille or large-print version, a different testing site, an extended amount of time for testing, or similar types of accommodations. You should meet with the child study team in your district to discuss necessary accommodations or modifications for your child. All accommodations and modifications must be specified in your child's IEP.

**17. Will the high school diploma my special education child receives be affected by whether he or she was exempted from passing the NJBCT?**

No. Currently, there is only one type of state-endorsed, locally issued high school diploma in New Jersey. If your child meets the requirements of his or her IEP, he or she will receive a state-endorsed diploma.

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## Your Child in a Vocational or Technical School

### 18. Must my child who is enrolled in a vocational or technical school pass the NJBCT?

Yes. Students who are enrolled in vocational and technical programs at comprehensive high schools or who attend shared-time or full-time vocational/technical schools must pass the test as one of the requirements for a high school diploma. Mastery of the skills tested was identified as necessary for all students. These skills are the foundation for all other learning, including vocational and technical skills.

### 19. How can I find out whether my child is learning the required skills?

You should speak first to your child's teachers, particularly those who teach biology and remedial skills. Other school staff who could help you are the principal, the guidance counselor, the basic skills coordinator, the Biology department chairperson, and the English as a second language (ESL) teacher and/or the bilingual/ESL coordinator if your child is limited English proficient (LEP).

### 20. What can I do at home to help my child pass the NJBCT?

Your child's teachers can suggest specific ways for you to help your child at home. In general, you can help by:

- Showing an interest in your child's work;
- Letting your child know that you have high expectations for his or her work;
- Providing a study area;
- Setting homework and study time every day;

- Asking to see your child's assignments and test results; and
- Making sure your child attends school regularly.

In order to have a secure test administration, students are not permitted to have cell phones or any other electronic device in any testing room. If your child has a cell phone or any other unauthorized electronic device while in a testing room, the test section for that day will be voided and your child will have to wait for the next scheduled test administration to complete the test.

### 21. How can I find out more about the NJBCT?

The New Jersey Department of Education has prepared a variety of materials to help parents and teachers prepare students for the test. These materials (this pamphlet, for example) are provided through your child's school and via the New Jersey Department of Education web site. Further information about the NJBCT and your child's progress toward development of the skills tested is available at your local high school or district office.

Information about statewide assessments is available on the New Jersey Department of Education web site at:

[www.state.nj.us/education](http://www.state.nj.us/education)

or by contacting the New Jersey Department of Education, Office of State Assessments, at:

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