

**NOCTI AS AN ALTERNATIVE PATHWAY
TO MEETING HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS
(§ 4.24 (b)(1)(iv))**

BRIEFING DOCUMENT

During the State Board's Council of Basic Education meeting on November 17, members will hear an update on implementation of the state's new system of high school graduation requirements. That presentation will include a report on the work of the State Assessment Validation Advisory Committee, which was charged with investigating the use of occupational skills tests as an alternative pathway to a high school diploma. The relevant regulatory language is below:

§ 4.51. State assessment system:

(1) The Department will establish a State Assessment Validation Advisory Committee (Committee). The Committee shall advise the Department on its plans to conduct the validity study and review and provide feedback on its findings. The Department and the Committee will investigate the use of a certificate based on industry approved standards and performance on a NOCTI [National Occupational Competency Testing Institute] exam as an alternative pathway to graduation and will make a report and recommendation to the Board by January 10, 2011.

As prescribed by the regulation, members of the committee included representatives of the State Board of Education, the Department of Education, the career and technical education community, school administrators, and the statewide teachers unions. Since its inaugural meeting in June, the committee has reviewed material such as [NOCTI](#) test blueprints and pass rates, explored the relationship between the NOCTI and the commonwealth's academic standards and assessments, and discussed opportunities for assigning greater value and credit for career and technical education. This effort led to agreement on several important points:

- The more than 170 NOCTI assessments administered at CTE centers statewide are rigorous measures for purposes of assessing occupational skill. In 2009, 37.9 percent of Pennsylvania NOCTI test takers (N = 5,730) fell short of proficiency.
- Despite the level of rigor, the *content* assessed by NOCTI is not aligned with Pennsylvania's academic standards in English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies.
- Postsecondary success—whether in college or the workforce—is contingent on proficiency in core academic skills, and especially the ability to be literate and numerate.
- NOCTI is an end-of-program assessment—*i.e.*, administered at the end of a student's 12th grade year. As a result, identifying the NOCTI as an alternative pathway to a high school diploma would create a high-stakes situation where students have only one chance to meet requirements ahead of graduation.

Based on these understandings, the committee's unanimous recommendation to the State Board is as follows:

To be eligible for this alternative pathway to state high school graduation requirements, CTE students must:

- 1. Meet all other requirements for graduation established by Chapter 4 (course completion and grades; completion of a culminating project; and demonstration of proficiency as determined by the LEA in each of the state academic standards not assessed by a state assessment under § 4.51); and*
- 2. Take and complete the courses associated with § 4.24 (b)(1)(iv) and take the associated Keystone Exams or comparable locally-developed, independently-validated assessments¹; and*
- 3. Complete a PA State Skill Assessment (such as NOCTI, NIMS, or other PDE-approved exam). Upon demonstration of proficiency as defined by the LEA related to ESEA subjects (algebra I, biology, and literature), students may meet graduation requirements by achieving a score of competent or advanced on a PA State Skill Assessment.*

This proposal ensures that all students have access to a rigorous curriculum aligned with state standards; encourages students to meet graduation requirements (either through state or rigorous local assessments as they move through middle and high school) to prevent a high-stakes testing situation; and provides flexibility that assigns value to a rigorous occupational skills test once a student has demonstrated proficiency in the three subjects required for federal accountability purposes.

The State Board of Education wishes to thank the committee members for lending their time and expertise to this important work:

Department of Education Appointments:

Dr. Lee Burket
Director, Bureau of Career and Technical Education

Dr. Richard Maraschiello
Office of the Secretary

¹ The committee strongly recommends that students who do not demonstrate proficiency should receive supplemental instruction, retake assessments and complete alternative assessments as available to provide students with every possible opportunity to meet requirements well in advance of their anticipated graduation date.

State Board Appointments:

Corrinne Caldwell, Ph.D.
Professor, Educational Administration, Temple University

Clyde Hornberger, Ph. D.
Executive Director, Lehigh Career and Technical Institute

PSEA Appointments:

Mr. W. Gerard Oleksiak
Special Education Teacher, Upper Merion School District/PSEA Treasurer

Dr. Harris Zwerling
Assistant Director of Research, PSEA

PAFT Appointments:

Ms. Rosalind Jones-Johnson, Philadelphia
Ms. Barbara Supinka, Pittsburgh

Selected by Committee:

Dr. Joseph Clapper
Superintendent, Quaker Valley School District

Dr. Robin Felty
Assistant Superintendent for Secondary Education, Warwick School District

Dr. Linda MacNeal
Director of K-12 Literacy & Assessment, Downingtown Area School District

Mr. David Warren
Executive Director, Lancaster County Career and Technology Center