

The High School Graduation Qualifying Exam (HSGQE) Noon V. State Settlement Overview

- Under Alaska law, all students are required to pass a High School Graduation Qualifying Exam (HSGQE) to receive a diploma.
- The HSGQE is a competency exam in the areas of reading, English and mathematics.
- Special needs students need to pass a competency exam.
- Special needs students are allowed certain accommodations as part of the testing process.
- Accommodations are testing provisions that help a student show proficiency but do not invalidate the test, such as providing a student a separate room in which to take the exam.
- If a special needs student does not receive a passing score on the HSGQE, the student is entitled to complete an alternative assessment program.
- The settlement of this class action is intended to provide clarity on what constitutes an alternative assessment program.

- At the outset, the parties in the lawsuit agreed on two principles that guided the negotiation:
 1. Students with disabilities should be held to the same standards of proficiency as other students.
 2. Students with disabilities should be allowed every opportunity to show their proficiency without interference from their disability.

- To achieve these principles and comply with the current state law that requires that all students pass a high school exit exam to qualify for a diploma, the parties agreed that the sequence of testing for students with disabilities should be as follows:
 1. All students take the HSGQE as sophomores.
 2. Students with disabilities will be provided approved accommodations.
 3. If a disabled student does not pass the HSGQE on first taking, the disabled student will be able to take a Modified HSGQE.
 4. A modification is a special provision for a student in a testing situation that usually would invalidate a test, such as allowing the student to use a graphing calculator. The department will approve a modification if the help it provides to the student outweighs the effect it has on the validity of the exam.
 5. Some students with severe disabilities who are on a diploma track but who did not pass the HSGQE will be eligible for a nonstandardized test -- a rigorous assessment of a student's work, judged by a jury of experts, that proves the student has met the state standards.
 6. For 2005, students with disabilities will be required to pass either the HSGQE, the Modified HSGQE, or the Nonstandardized HSGQE, but a safeguard will be provided if the state and local districts do not provide a student with the appropriate accommodations or modifications in a timely manner.

- In addition, to implement the settlement, the commissioner will recommend to the Alaska State Board of Education & Early Development that it:
 1. Provide for a non-binding review by the state of school district decisions about accommodations and modifications.
 2. Require districts to meet with parents of students with disabilities who are in the 9th grade to explain the assessment options for the HSGQE.
 3. Allow districts to seek reconsideration from the commissioner of education if the department disapproves a school district request for a modification for a student with a disability.
 4. Redraft the Participation Guidelines for the participation of students with disabilities in assessments so that the guidelines:
 - Expand the list of pre-approved accommodations for the HSGQE and all other state mandated assessments.
 - Expand the list of pre-approved modifications for the Modified HSGQE only.
 - Provide guidance to districts on how to determine whether a proposed change is an accommodation or a modification.
 - Explain how the department will approve or disapprove a modification requested for the Modified HSGQE.