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ABSTRACT

Principles of sound educational assessment are discussed, along with current assessment issues and appropriate roles of colleges and the state in developing and implementing assessment systems. Assessment practice in New Jersey is considered. Principles of good assessment include: assessment should serve, not dictate, educational purposes; forms of assessment designed to serve one purpose will not necessarily be suitable to serve another; judgments regarding individuals, programs, and colleges should be based on multiple indicators of performance; and when improvement in educational practice is desired, faculty should help shape assessment purposes and procedures. Features of schools that influence the most appropriate forms of assessment include mission, curricula, and faculty roles. Efforts to develop more systematic assessment procedures at the state level in New Jersey include the Basic Skills Assessment Program and the College Outcomes Evaluation Program. One major issue concerning assessment is whether students should be required by the state to pass a particular test in order to be permitted to proceed to the next phase of their college education. A resolution concerning assessment principles in New Jersey is included. (SW)

A POSITION PAPER ON POSTSECONDARY ASSESSMENT

New Jersey Department of Higher Education

January 12, 1987

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Introduction

As recent events have shown, assessment is a subject that frequently sparks debate and that easily lends itself to confusion. The specific issues that have been raised in regard to the latest annual "effectiveness report" of the Basic Skills Council are addressed in an accompanying memorandum. Those issues, however, are only one part of a host of broader concerns that must be discussed and resolved as New Jersey moves toward the establishment of a comprehensive postsecondary assessment system. We believe, therefore, that there is value at this time in stepping back and looking at the topic of postsecondary assessment from a broader and more philosophical perspective.

Many decisions yet remain to be made regarding the forms and the purposes of assessment that will best meet the improvement needs of New Jersey's higher education community and the accountability concerns of the public it serves. As alternatives are debated in the coming year, we felt it would be helpful to specify clearly the beliefs and principles that have guided us to this point, and that will continue to shape our choices and priorities as state-level assessment policies are developed and implemented. Accordingly, the discussion which follows provides a brief overview of the major concepts and principles of good assessment practice, comments on considerations that are inherent to higher education settings, sets forth appropriate state and institutional roles in the development of a comprehensive statewide postsecondary assessment system, and addresses issues of current concern in the context of New Jersey's ongoing assessment efforts.

First, however, it might be well to offer a brief definition. Assessment, broadly speaking, involves making an informed judgment about a person, a program or some other item of interest. As such, assessment is hardly an uncommon activity; it is something that happens every day in practically every setting. Who should make such judgments, how, and for what purpose, however, are all questions that can occasion legitimate disagreements. Further, the process of collecting information to support these judgments is rarely as systematic or as open as it should be.

How best to make informed judgments about people and programs is a question with answers that can be both deceptively simple and dauntingly complex. For higher education, no other issue has greater implications for creating, substantiating and perpetuating the excellence and access we seek. Assessment's close ties to educational reform have been

recognized in a growing legion of national reports which, though disparate in their authors, audiences and emphases, share the common theme that the time has indisputably come to make the practice of systematic assessment a responsible reality at all levels. We agree, and New Jersey's postsecondary community has, in fact, already begun to take giant strides in that direction.

It must be remembered, however, that the complex problems that we face in higher education today are seldom amenable to simple solutions. Assessment has the potential to be a potent and dramatic tool in addressing these problems, but it is not, nor should it be, more than that -- a tool, a means to an end. And it is the ends -- the positive impact that we expect a sound college education to have on a student, and our desire to extend these benefits to the widest possible portion of our population -- that we must keep firmly and clearly in sight as issues are debated and actions pursued.

Assessment Concepts and Principles

Assessment is conducted in order to produce information that will assist certain audiences to make various kinds of decisions. In higher education, these decisions might be made about individuals, courses, programs, institutions, sectors, policies or the system as a whole. The first step in designing an assessment effort is to determine what is to be evaluated, by whom, and for what purpose; all else follows from these primary determinations. Typically, information is collected so that action can be taken to improve the performance of an individual, program, etc., or alternatively, so that action can be taken to judge that individual or program. Generally such judgments carry with them some permanent consequence for the subject involved.

In the case of individuals -- and more particularly, students -- assessment designed to improve student performance might be conducted for diagnostic purposes in order to choose appropriate instructional coursework or instructional methods, or for feedback purposes to promote additional learning. More judgmental considerations come into play when assessment information is used to make decisions regarding admission, grades, advancement to higher rank, or professional licensure. Similarly for programs or institutions, assessment may be conducted with a primary view toward making improvements through reallocation of resources or modification of methods, or to enable others to make more sweeping decisions regarding the best college to attend, budget allocations or even whether an institution should continue to exist.

Once it has been determined what is to be assessed, and for what purpose, then a second set of decisions must be made regarding how best to collect information that will serve that need. A considerable amount of analysis must usually be conducted in order to define the concept to be assessed (be it overall program effectiveness or an individual's mastery of a certain class of skills) in measurable terms.

This is particularly true in education, where many of the most important ends sought (for example, enthusiasm for learning or the ability to think critically) resist being reduced to simple objective measures. This analysis is shaped not only by one's sense of what the concept "means" in performance terms, but also by the method chosen to produce information about that performance. Many different types of data collection strategies exist. They range from local or standardized tests to the observation and rating of performance in real or simulated settings to the analysis of worksamples or documentary records to the formal registering of the opinions of experts or other involved parties. Once data collection methods have been chosen, other decisions have to be made regarding sampling, data analysis techniques, and procedures for reporting results to various audiences. All of these decisions are strongly influenced by the original purposes of the data collection effort.

With these ideas in mind, it is possible to identify a set of principles that are basic to good assessment practice in education. They include the following:

- o Assessment's role is to serve, not dictate, educational purposes. It is the educational need that should determine the choice of appropriate forms of assessment. Too often, assessment instruments are used because they are available, convenient and produce easily summarized results, rather than because they directly contribute to an identified purpose. When assessment procedures become so cumbersome that instruction is diminished rather than enhanced, or when curriculum is unduly devoted to those skills and capacities that are most easily measured, then students suffer rather than benefit.

- o Forms of assessment designed to serve one purpose will not necessarily be suitable to serve another. With careful planning, assessment devices frequently can be designed to serve multiple purposes, but this approach must be pursued cautiously. Confusion often arises since information collected about individuals can be used to make judgments about programs or institutions. If an assessment instrument is designed to yield specific information about students for a given purpose, then it may very well be inappropriate to use that information to make general judgments about a program; conversely, an assessment designed to make judgments about a program may well be inappropriate for use in making general judgments about a student.

- o Assessment is more than just testing. Tests have a long history of useful service in education. Standardized tests in particular have value in that they produce results that are easily compared and summarized. However, while tests have their role, that role is a limited one -- only certain kinds of performance can be captured and judged in objective tests; many other, equally important, kinds of skills or outcomes are

better examined with other types of assessment procedures. Tests are simply one type of tool among many that can be used to build the larger review and accountability system that is the more comprehensive goal of educational assessment.

- o Whenever possible, judgments regarding individuals, programs or institutions should be based on multiple indicators of performance. Rarely does a single indicator yield valid and reliable information on all aspects of a subject under investigation. In order to ensure a full and fair representation of performance or ability, multiple measures derived from multiple sources are required. This principle, especially as it relates to higher education, has been clearly articulated by Gregory Anrig, the president of the Educational Testing Service (the nation's largest measurement organization), as well as by the Education Commission of the States and the National Governors' Association in their calls for more comprehensive assessment by and of colleges and universities.

- o To the extent that improvement in educational practice is desired, those responsible for conducting instruction should be given a strong voice in shaping assessment purposes and procedures. If faculty have a reasonable degree of ownership in an assessment system -- in other words, if they believe that what is assessed is important and that it is measured in an appropriate manner -- then they will be much more likely to take constructive actions in response to assessment results. It is this active participation in ongoing cycles of assessment that constitutes institutionalization of the pursuit of excellence. As Governor Kean has commented, "detailed state reviews of programs do not motivate faculty members to assess and reform programs themselves; rather they tend to relieve them of this critical responsibility." Such top-down approaches, notes the Governor, are "self-defeating".*

- o A comprehensive postsecondary assessment system must layer many different types of evaluation. This means that assessments must be designed for both improvement and judgment purposes, and be conducted by people both internal and external to the program being reviewed. While evaluation practiced internally builds a strong foundation for all other types of assessment as well, it is not, in itself, sufficient to meet the legitimate needs of state policy-makers and the public they serve. Certain critical data must be routinely and reliably collected across all institutions to produce measures of system effectiveness, and provisions must be made for securing appropriate evaluative judgments by disinterested experts at appropriate intervals.

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* The Chronicle of Higher Education, September 11, 1985.

Assessment in Higher Education Settings

In putting in place its various strategies for promoting stronger and more systematic assessment, the New Jersey Board of Higher Education has recognized that colleges and universities, like institutions of any kind, have special (and sometimes unique) characteristics that influence the forms of assessment that will be most appropriate to that setting. The characteristic with the most overriding impact is the diversity of the higher education system, both in the nature of the institutions themselves and of the students they serve. For institutions, diversity is primarily reflected in missions, curricula and faculty roles. Each is discussed briefly below:

- o Mission While there is certainly a reasonable degree of overlap in the goals of New Jersey's various institutions of higher education, there are also significant distinctions in the ends they pursue. Some institutions see their primary mission as teaching; others give equal weight to research or service. Some institutions are open, by design, to all prospective students while others exercise varying degrees of admissions selectivity. Some specialize in particular curricular areas or fields of study; others pride themselves on their wealth of curricular offerings. Some offer associate degrees, others primarily bachelor's degrees, and still others focus on graduate degrees. Some provide a residential learning atmosphere; others seek to serve those students who wish to combine study with family and career.

- o Curricula The academic contributions made by a college vary according to the field of study a given student pursues and the particular curricular and instructional emphases of the college he or she has chosen. While each college may (and generally does) define a "core" set of educational experiences for all students, such cores are typically flexible, and vary from institution to institution. College curricula branch in multiple directions to reflect the growing specialization of knowledge and the complex combinations of interests, strengtns and weaknesses to be found among individuals. The curricula pursued by students do not follow lockstep year-to-year progressions. Even the common distinction made between "general education" and the "major" cannot be neatly divided between tne sophomore and junior years. In fact, Ernest Boyer, in his recently released report for the Carnegie Foundation (College: The Undergraduate Experience in America) has recommended that there be further vertical integration of both core and major study across the entire baccalaureate program.

- o Faculty Roles U.S. Education Secretary William Bennett has commented in discussing a recently released report on education in Japan that "American higher education remains the standard

for the world."* Part of the reason that this country has been able to set that standard is that college faculty historically have been allowed to assume local control over matters pertaining to educational policy, including the determination of curricula and the setting of academic standards. The freedom of faculty to experiment and take risks is an essential component of the environment that has made American higher education so successful. Faculty have played a strong role in institutional governance, and have enjoyed considerable latitude in the classroom, where their responsibilities extend, not only to teaching, but to evaluating individual students.

In part the diversity of institutions reflects the diversity of the students they serve. By the time students reach college, they are young (and, increasingly, older) adults, rather than children, with a greater wealth and variety of life experience to influence their interests and learning styles. They choose to attend college and assume its associated responsibilities, including the payment of financial costs, voluntarily. They come with differing needs and motivations: some for a second chance to master basic skills, others to explore career possibilities, many to prepare for an initial career choice, others for continuing professional education and some to retrain for a second or third career. Still others are less immediately career-oriented, and pursue the versatility that comes from a strong foundation in the liberal arts. Some seek the non-academic growth that colleges provide through residential and extra-curricular programming; others are solely focused on concrete educational ends. Further, increasing numbers of students take longer than four years to complete a bachelor's degree, choosing instead to "stop in and out" of college or to study part-time, often due to ongoing employment and family obligations. According to the Center for Education Statistics, a majority of those who go to college now either delay their entrance or take longer than four years to finish, or both.

Aside from diversity, there is an additional complication that truly makes assessment as much an art as a science in higher education: the complexity of many of the higher-order skills it strives to teach. The ability to reason, to think critically, to engage in disciplined inquiry, to show aesthetic appreciation, to understand one's self and others, to make reasoned ethical choices -- these, and related abilities, are extraordinarily difficult to define, much less measure. While the diversity and complexity just described pose considerable challenges, however, neither of these considerations means that systematic assessment can or should not be conducted for institutions of higher education. Important commonalities can be identified in goals, instruction and standards; and valid information can be collected about higher-order skills. They do mean, however, that any assessment system designed for this setting must be as flexible and complex as the enterprise itself.

* Education Daily, January 5, 1987.

Institutional and State Assessment Roles

In discussing the roles that the state and institutions should play in establishing a comprehensive postsecondary assessment system, two essential points must be made. First, the best and most effective system will result when institutions are actively involved in its creation, and when they shoulder the full measure of the responsibility tnat has been reserved for them. Second, if there is persistent evidence that institutions are unable or unwilling to assume their assessment duties, then the state can and must step in to ensure that the job gets done. Rather than waning, public pressure supporting the development of more rigorous and accessible assessment procedures has continued to intensify; it should be more than clear by now to all concerned that a lackluster or halfhearted response by our colleges and universities will lead to tne imposition of evaluative mechanisms of external design. A vigorous and substantive response, however, will serve to reinforce traditional local prerogatives and the continued delegation of responsibility.

The contributions expected from institutions are many, and they rest at the very heart of the matter: institutions have both the opportunity and the obligation to take primary responsibility for the assessment of students. It is up to the faculty in each college and university, not just to teach students, but to determine what a college education should mean. Faculty must set clear, and sufficiently high, academic standards; devise appropriate measures of learning; and make a series of judgments about each student to ensure that by the time he or she leaves with a degree, those standards have been met. (The campus-level responsibility for assessing individuals also extends to the evaluation of faculty, administrators, and staff for hiring, promotion and tenure -- as well as for ongoing professional development.) Further, administrators, in company with faculty, have the responsibility to find effective ways to review the performance of programs or the institution as a whole, and to use that information to make improvements.

No matter how conscientiously institutions fulfill these duties, however, there are still certain tasks that fall properly to the Board and Department of Higher Education. The state has the responsibility to ensure that the mechanisms for program and institutional evaluation adopted at the local level are sufficiently systematic, rigorous and objective. It must also guarantee that institutions make adequate information available so that the Board can make appropriate decisions regarding budget recommendations to the Governor, approval of new degree programs, and other policy matters. Finally, the Board must provide the public (and its elected representatives) with the information needed to establish full confidence tnat New Jersey's public institutions of higher education spend tax dollars wisely, educate the state's citizens well and make tangible contributions to the state's general well-being. These last two responsibilities sometimes require that the Board structure reporting mechanisms so that comparable data can be collected from all institutions, thereby allowing their presentation in summarized

and easily understandable forms. The state thus serves a coordinating and oversight role, complementing what is done at the local level and putting in place those review and reporting systems that demand a statewide perspective. To do this job well, however, requires that the state seek the involvement of institutions, since no summary can be any better than the individual pieces of information it summarizes.

To this end, the state must also work to encourage more and better assessment on campuses. It can do so by providing technical assistance, since assessment is a complicated -- and sometimes unfamiliar -- endeavor that may require expertise beyond what already exists at a given institution. The state can also establish a set of incentives and sanctions to encourage progress and penalize insufficient effort. These may frequently be budgetary in nature, but other avenues -- including the simple ability to call public attention to successes and failures -- can also be effective. One of the most important considerations faced by the state is finding a judicious balance between applying appropriate pressures on institutions to assume their assessment responsibilities and showing appropriate patience in allowing their efforts to succeed. After all, those institutions that have received the most recognition for their assessment systems (for example, Northeast Missouri State University and Alverno College) took as long as a decade to develop them. Assessment is not simple, nor is consensus, and both require considerable time and effort to achieve.

Postsecondary Assessment Initiatives in New Jersey

In New Jersey, a carefully considered and very important process has already been put in place to develop more systematic assessment procedures at both the state and institutional level. Of the several state-level assessment efforts that are currently underway in New Jersey, the most well-known are the Basic Skills Assessment Program and the College Outcomes Evaluation Program. Both have been designed to reflect the various principles and considerations outlined above.

The New Jersey Basic Skills Assessment Program (BSAP) was instituted in 1977 to provide an overall assessment of beginning college students' level of preparation in certain "basic skills" considered essential to successful academic work at the college level, and to provide data useful to colleges for the purpose of placing students in courses appropriate to their level of preparation. All students are tested after admission, using a standard test developed by the Basic Skills Council, an advisory group composed of faculty and administrators representing each of the college sectors in the state. Over time, the functions of the Basic Skills Council have evolved beyond the monitoring of testing and placement standards to include a comprehensive assessment of the effectiveness of public college remedial programs.

The College Outcomes Evaluation Program (COEP), which was instituted in 1985, is much more recent in origin than the basic skills effort and much broader in scope. Its task is to provide a comprehensive description of the impact that public higher education programs and institutions have, not just on students, but on the state as a whole. Clearly, however, assessing the benefits that students derive from college instruction is a central focus of this effort. Included in the Board's charge to the COEP Advisory Committee is a mandate to recommend ways to assess student learning related to all aspects of college curricula--the development of higher-order thinking abilities, the acquisition of the knowledge and skills associated with the "general education" component of college study, and the mastery of a major field of specialization--through an appropriate combination of statewide and local measures.

In addition to recommending means for assessing student learning in college, the scope of the College Outcomes Evaluation Program also encompasses other aspects of student development, including the recommendation of procedures for collecting information on student satisfaction, retention and graduation rates, and post-graduation activities and achievements. Further, since the outcomes of higher education extend beyond its immediate impact on students, the program is also investigating means for documenting the economic, social and cultural contributions of colleges and universities (and their faculties) to local communities, the state as a whole, and society at large.

The College Outcomes Evaluation Program, is, in effect, both a challenge and an opportunity for our colleges to play a major and substantive role in designing and implementing a comprehensive postsecondary assessment system. In establishing this process, the Board indicated that the assessment system that emerges should be "consistent with the joint principles of maintaining public confidence, nurturing institutional autonomy and individual diversity, and stimulating educational excellence." In pursuing these ends, COEP has followed the successful participatory model pioneered by the Basic Skills Assessment Program. Four broadly representative sub-committees, under the guidance of a coordinating advisory committee, are working to explore a wide range of ideas and methodologies for substantiating the outcomes of higher education. A well-attended conference last October provided further opportunity for broad involvement as consensus continues to be sought on constructive and workable assessment strategies that fully satisfy the principles on which the program is based. A second conference, with even broader representation, is planned for this spring. Deliberations and development work are proceeding on schedule; a final report presenting the results will be brought to the Board this coming fall.

Other assessment-related initiatives taken by the Board of Higher Education include the establishment in 1981 of a system for periodic peer review of ongoing programs and the recent development of a Student Unit Record Enrollment computerized data system to provide comparable data across institutions regarding student characteristics and their

progress through the system. Further, the Board's policy of requiring evaluation plans and evaluation reports in association with awards made through its various grant programs has received a particularly high priority in conjunction with the institutional challenge grant program. Under its aegis, institutions receiving awards must document their progress in achieving distinction in the areas that they have defined as uniquely appropriate to their missions. Also in the planning stages is a project to review the cumulative impact of all the Departmental grant programs on students and institutions in the state. Finally, in addition to the wealth of information that is routinely provided in conjunction with the budget recommendation process, the Board has instituted special institutional reporting procedures in connection with areas of high priority concern, such as student retention and minority enrollments.

Current Assessment Issues

While many issues have and will continue to surface as New Jersey proceeds toward the development of a comprehensive postsecondary assessment system, recent debates have tended to center on the issue of "gatekeeping" and, more specifically, on whether students should be required by the state to pass a particular test in order to be permitted to proceed to the next phase of their college education. This issue has arisen both in regard to students' proceeding from remedial coursework to college-level study, and from lower division to upper division status. The first instance involves the New Jersey College Basic Skills Placement Test and its use for remedial post-testing, and the second concerns the assessment of student learning that is being designed in conjunction with the College Outcomes Evaluation Program. In both cases, it has been the position of the Department that the results of such testing should primarily be used to evaluate and improve the programs and institutions involved, and that individual institutions should continue to determine what role such tests should play in making decisions about the fate of individual students.

The event which precipitated the latest round of discussions on this issue was the release by the Basic Skills Council of its annual "effectiveness report" on remedial programming. The report shows that, while in most cases students who exit remediation are adequately prepared to pursue college-level coursework, there are concerns over the lack of post-test data for some programs and over low percentages of students reaching minimum competencies for others. The provision of remedial educational services at the college-level has, of course, long been controversial in its own right; such instruction can clearly never be expected to completely replace the learning that should take place in the first twelve years of education. Nonetheless, large numbers of students enter college without an adequate foundation of basic skills, and New Jersey's higher education community has, as a whole, committed itself to giving these students a second chance (and society a second chance to benefit from their untapped potential). In some respects,

too, it is a better chance: many of these students, as they mature, in voluntarily seeking further education bring with them a motivation to succeed that can often outweigh the educational disadvantages they have. In taking on this commitment, however, New Jersey's higher education community has also taken on the responsibility to be accountable for these students' progress, and their ultimate success.

The issue of gate-keeping is, in one sense, not an issue at all. Almost all educators agree that appropriate standards must be set that define what it means to receive a high school diploma or a baccalaureate degree, and that such standards must be uniformly applied to all students. The questions and arguments arise when agreement is sought on the detailed forms such standards should take, and the means by which their achievement should be measured. Appropriate "gates" must exist for education to have integrity and for the public to have confidence in the skills of its graduates at various levels. Furthermore, at the postsecondary level, it would be unprofessional, if not exploitative, to allow students to persist and incur high costs when their talents would be best developed elsewhere. By the same token, however, there are high costs incurred whenever students who do have potential are blocked from proceeding.

When gates are rigidly defined and rigidly applied, there may be certain undesirable consequences, particularly given the ambitious aims of postsecondary education and the imperfect measurement devices available to assess their achievement. While few students may be undeservingly certified as skilled, significant numbers of individuals with unrealized potential or unrecognized capabilities would find the doors closed on their personal ambitions. Faced with an inflexible gate, particularly one not of their own making, institutions may be tempted to revert to a single model of excellence based on admissions selectivity, thus diminishing access and leaving large portions of the population underserved. This response would also tend to shift the balance of responsibility for success away from the institution and toward the student, thereby lessening the chances that student deficiencies in clearing the gate will spur program improvement. Finally, society would have available fewer individuals with the preparation necessary to assume a productive place in an economy which requires increasingly sopnisticated skills, thus perpetuating the ills associated with the presence of an economically-trapped underclass.

The question, then, is not whether there should be gates, but rather the forms such gates should take and the degree of flexibility they should exhibit. Further, the issue is one of whether one test -- any test -- should in and of itself constitute a gate for students in a setting that is characterized by diverse and complex aims. Using a single test for such a purpose violates the principle that such decisions should be made on the basis of multiple indicators of performance and may, if the test in question was originally designed to serve other purposes, even cause the decision to turn not just on insufficient, but on inappropriate data. Further, for the state to

mandate that such a test be used in such a fashion intrudes on the academic independence traditionally accorded college faculty, and courts the danger that the test will come to represent the sum total of what students should know.

Determining whether individual students should be admitted to college, or whether they may continue in college, or whether they should receive a degree are judgments best made at the campus level where faculty can design and review, not only test data, but additional measures of performance based on coursework and other structured opportunities for assessment that more closely approximate the demands of the non-academic world. Faculty can determine the appropriate timing for such multiple assessments, and can provide greater opportunity for individualization based on the characteristics of their particular student body. They are in the ideal position to provide an effective, sophisticated and fair way of ensuring that students meet standards, both in the sense of causing the requisite learning to take place, and of documenting that such learning has, in fact, been achieved.

This said, it is also the case that faculty may take on this duty with greater or lesser skill and enthusiasm. The gates they adopt may be too low or too porous; instructional programs may be less than adequate; sufficient accountability data may not be forthcoming for the public to review. Thus the Board must take final responsibility and serve as the ultimate judge of the appropriateness and comprehensiveness of institutional assessment systems in contributing to student learning and meeting state accountability needs. This is a responsibility that the Board has exercised in the past, and it is a responsibility that it should continue to exercise in the future.

Conclusion

Aims C. McGuiness, Jr., assistant director of the Education Commission of the States, has commented on our efforts as follows:

> New Jersey is a bellwether state on the delicate issue of assessment of college outcomes. This is not necessarily because New Jersey has already found all the answers; it is because both state and institutional leaders have been bold enough to confront the issue and to determine that a responsible system of outcomes evaluations can be developed. It is important that what New Jersey does be done well, for it will likely set a pattern for the nation. (The Newark Star Ledger, October 19, 1986)

While much remains to be done before our task is completed, New Jersey has every reason to be proud of the higher education assessment efforts that have been made in the state to this point. The Basic Skills

Council is fulfilling its role with competence and dedication. The COEP process should finish its work on its appointed schedule; when its report is brought before the Board, there will be ample opportunity for discussion to determine if that work has been done well. If it has not, further action will be taken. Meanwhile both the Board and the Department will make every effort to ensure that progress continues in all assessment arenas, so that our system of public higher education in New Jersey will be second in quality to none.

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

STATE BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

A RESOLUTION ENDORSING PRINCIPLES OF POSTSECONDARY ASSESSMENT AND REAFFIRMING COMMITMENT TO ONGOING ASSESSMENT INITIATIVES

WHEREAS: The Board of Higher Education has as one of its most critical goals the establishment of a sound and comprehensive system of postsecondary assessment; and

WHEREAS: The Board has had in place since 1977 the New Jersey Basic Skills Assessment Program, which provides an overall assessment of entering college students' proficiencies in basic skills; and

WHEREAS: The Board has more recently established the College Outcomes Evaluation Program (COEP) to develop a comprehensive assessment of the impact of higher education institutions on their students and the state as a whole; and

WHEREAS: The Chancellor of Higher Education has reiterated in the attached policy paper the philosophy and principles underlying New Jersey's current postsecondary assessment initiatives; now therefore be it

RESOLVED: That the Board of Higher Education endorses the philosophy and principles of postsecondary assessment as expressed in the attached paper; and, be it further

RESOLVED: That the Board of Higher Education reaffirms its commitment to its ongoing assessment initiatives and encourages the institutions of higher education and the Department to continue their progress in this vital area.

February 20, 1987