



NYSED Commissioner MaryEllen Elia

Dear Teachers and Administrators,

As you know, the Grades 3-8 English Language Arts (ELA) tests will be administered to students across the state next week, and the Grades 3-8 Mathematics tests will be administered in early May. These annual ELA and math tests for students in grades 3-8 are required by the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015. The tests are designed to measure how well students are mastering the learning standards that guide classroom instruction and help to ensure that students are on track to graduate from high school with the critical thinking, problem solving, and reasoning skills needed for success in college and the modern workplace. The tests also show how schools and districts are progressing with the learning standards and can support professional development for teachers.

Since assuming my role as New York's Commissioner of Education almost four years ago, I have traveled all over the state listening to concerns from educators and parents about the Grades 3-8 ELA and Math Tests. I believe teachers are a critical component in creating quality assessments that match our learning standards. That's why we have made substantive changes with teachers guiding our work. As a result, the New York State Education Department (NYSED) and the Board of Regents made significant changes to the tests, beginning in 2016. Below you will find information about the 2019 tests, including a summary of the changes.

Fewer Test Sessions and Questions

Like the 2018 tests, the 2019 Grades 3-8 ELA and Math Tests are two sessions each. With fewer test sessions, each test will have substantially fewer questions than in recent years, lessening test fatigue for students and better enabling them to demonstrate what they know and are able to do.

Greater Teacher Involvement

Teachers from across the state serve on committees to write, select and evaluate questions for the tests. Hundreds of New York State educators were involved in creating and reviewing questions for the 2019 Grades 3-8 ELA and Math Tests and selecting the questions for the test forms. This year, New York State teachers reviewed all questions for inclusion on the assessments at least six times.

Faster Results for Teachers

Like the previous three years, NYSED plans to return instructional reports to teachers and schools by the end of the school year and to release at least 75% of the test questions. This is one of the highest release rates in the country.

Untimed Tests

Like the 2016-2018 tests, the 2019 Grades 3-8 ELA and Math Tests will be untimed. In general, this means that as long as students are working productively, they will have as much time as they need to complete each test session, within the confines of the regular school day. Schools and districts have discretion to allow students to read silently or quietly exit the room when they have completed their test while others continue to work.

Improved Resources for Parents

The 2019 Score Reports for parents will feature more information about what students should know and be able to do at each grade level. In addition, updated parent resources about the 2019 tests are available on our assessment website. The resources have important information about what parents need to know about the 2019 assessments and answer many frequently asked questions about the tests. The 2019 parent fact sheet and FAQ are also available in several additional languages, including Chinese (Simplified), Haitian Creole, Russian, and Spanish.

Computer-Based Testing

Some schools have chosen to administer the 2019 Grades 3-8 ELA and Math Tests on computers rather than by paper and pencil. The computer-based tests (CBT) will have the same questions as the paper versions. Students in those schools utilizing the CBT option have access to CBT practice tests and most have had prior experience participating in other computer-based tests in ELA and Math. The long-term plan is for all schools to use CBT for annual state tests. CBT has the potential to further reduce the need for stand-alone field tests and make assessments better instructional tools for students with disabilities.

I hope these resources and information are helpful. We will continue to improve our assessments with the help of great education professionals from across the state.

Sincerely,

MaryEllen Elia

Commissioner of Education