



PARENTS' GUIDE TO ASSESSMENTS IN NEW YORK

Beginning in spring 2013, New York State began to test students in grades 3-8 with new assessments aligned to Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS). The CCLS were adopted in January 2011.

High school students in New York State also take Regents Exams that measure student achievement in high-school level courses. In order to graduate from high school with a Regents Diploma, students must pass exams in five subjects: English, mathematics, science, global history and U.S. history and government. Students may also earn an Advanced Regents diploma if they pass additional exams in math, science and a foreign language. Beginning in June 2014, ELA and mathematics Regents Exams were also aligned to CCLS.

These tests are designed to measure how well students are mastering the standards—and ultimately how ready they are for the next grade and for college and careers after graduation.

This guide focuses on all new assessments for ELA and mathematics.

THE ASSESSMENTS

Teachers and principals talk a lot about assessments, which are used to measure students' academic achievement. This document highlights the end-of-year summative assessments, which judge (1) student progress toward mastering state standards and (2) program and school effectiveness. For other assessments used, see box at right.

Types of assessments

Classroom-based: Individual tests given by teachers as needed throughout the year to assess knowledge and skills in specific areas

Interim: The same test repeated at set intervals to measure student growth over time

Summative: End-of-year assessments administered by the state to measure student performance against a common set of standards

This document addresses summative assessments.

THIS GUIDE INCLUDES:

- Overview of assessments which measure student proficiency against more rigorous standards
- Overview of accountability for students, teachers and schools
- Additional resources for parents



New summative assessments address longstanding concerns that parents, educators and employers have had about current state assessments—namely that they measure ability to memorize facts, rather than the skills to think critically and apply knowledge.

What is different about the new assessments?

The new assessments for English and mathematics enable educators to deepen their understanding of student progress from grade to grade—and just as importantly, identify any gaps in progress so they can address them **well before students enter college or the workforce**.

ELA assessments demonstrate:

- Whether students can read and comprehend texts of varying complexities.
- How well students can integrate information across sources to make a persuasive argument.
- The degree to which students can use context to determine the meaning of academic vocabulary

Math assessments demonstrate:

- Whether students understand and can use important math ideas, including number sense, algebraic thinking, geometry and data analysis.
- The extent to which students can use math facts and reasoning skills to solve real-world problems.
- How well students can make math arguments.

Benefits of New Assessments:

- The assessments allow students to show their work and explain their reasoning so teachers can better understand what they know and where there are gaps in learning that need to be addressed.
- Rather than focusing on what a child has memorized through multiple choice questions, the new tests ask students to apply skills like thinking, reasoning and justifying answers—showing what they know and can do.
- The tests do not lend themselves to “teaching to the test.” Since they focus on applying skills, it is the daily practice of these skills in the classroom that will serve as the best preparation for the tests.
- The Common Core Tests are administered with pencil and paper. Computer-based assessments will eventually replace the pencil and paper tests (exceptions will be made for schools that do not yet have the technology). Computer-based assessments are more efficient, innovative and engaging, and they enable insight into student progress at multiple points.
- The new assessments are designed to provide accurate measures of achievement and growth for all students, including those with disabilities and English language learners.



College and career readiness defined:

The level of preparation a student needs to enroll and succeed—without remediation—in a credit-bearing course at a postsecondary institution that offers a baccalaureate degree or in a high-quality certificate program that enables students to enter a career pathway with potential future advancement.

Sample Questions by Grade Level

The following questions are representative of those found on the new assessments.

EXAMPLE OF A 4TH GRADE MATH QUESTION

SAMPLE QUESTION

The students in the Go Green club started a school recycling program. In September, the students collected 86 pounds of paper and 18 pounds of cans to recycle. For October, their goal is to collect three times the amount of paper and five times the amount of cans they collected in September.

If the club meets its goal, how many total pounds of paper and cans will the students collect in September and October combined?

Show your work

EXAMPLE OF A 6TH GRADE ELA QUESTION

SAMPLE QUESTION

Students are asked to read a non-fiction article by John Perritano, titled *Goo Fighters* and answer the following:

Sometimes big ideas come from small observations. How does John Bartlett's invention show a big idea coming from a small observation? What steps did John Bartlett take to develop his idea into a product? Use details from the article to support your response.

In your response, be sure to:

- Explain how John Bartlett's invention shows that big ideas can come from small observations
- Describe the steps John Bartlett took to develop his idea into product
- Use details from the article to support your response

EXAMPLE OF AN ELA QUESTION ON A REGENTS EXAMINATION

WRITING FROM SOURCES

Directions: Closely read each of the **five** texts provided on pages 24 through 34 and write an evidence-based argument on the topic below. You may use the margins to take notes as you read and the next page to plan your response. Write your response in the space provided.

Topic: Was the Federal Theatre Project successful?

Your Task: Carefully read each of the **five** texts provided. Then, using evidence from at least **four** of the texts, write a well-developed argument regarding the success of the Federal Theatre Project. Clearly establish your claim, distinguish your claim from alternate or opposing claims, and use specific and relevant evidence from at least **four** of the texts to develop your argument. Do not simply summarize each text.

What Parents Can Expect

The ELA and mathematics assessments aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards are designed to measure the more rigorous expectations of the state standards. Because the tests measure complex skills, which are different from the skills measured by previous state tests, scores on the assessments look lower. But students aren't doing worse—it's just that the bar is higher.

As students and teachers gain the skills and knowledge needed to meet the new higher standards, performance will also improve. In other states where more rigorous tests have been implemented, students improved their performance after the first year.

How should parents interpret score reports?

For Grades 3-8 ELA and math tests, each student receives an individual score report for both subjects. Included is a scale score, which is determined by the number of points the student earned on the test. The higher the number of points on the test, the higher the scale score will be. The scale score then corresponds to a performance level. The score reports provide parents with information about their child's performance level (Levels are from 1-4, with 4 being the highest level) as well as information about their child's performance compared to other children in the same grade across the state.

The New York State Education Department has developed materials to help parents understand score reports. For more information on interpreting Grades 3-8 Common Core score reports, visit: p12.nysed.gov/assessment/ei/eiscorereportscc.html

For Regents Exams aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards, the Department will provide a raw score to scale score conversion chart, just as it has done for previous Regents Exams. The scale will range from 0–100 and a score of 65 will be required for Regents Diploma purposes. What is new for the Common Core-aligned Regents Exams is that the Department will provide students with a chart illustrating cut scores for five performance levels:

- Level 5: Exceeds Common Core expectations
- Level 4: Meets Common Core expectations — first required for Regents Diploma purposes with the Class of 2022
- Level 3: Partially meets Common Core expectations — required for current Regents Diploma purposes
- Level 2 (Safety Net): Partially meets Common Core expectations
- Level 1: Does not demonstrate Knowledge and Skills for Level 2

For more information on interpreting Common Core Regents Exams, visit: p12.nysed.gov/assessment/commoncore/updateccregentsexams-514.pdf

How do schools support students during the transition?

Schools have created a variety of models to assist students who are struggling with the standards. Remediation and summer courses, in-class adjustments based on ongoing in-class assessment results and pull-out tutoring are just a few support strategies. Parents should collaborate with teachers and administrators to develop a plan as needed.

In order to provide students and parents with the resources to do better on tests, the New York State Education Department (NYSED) has provided online access to a representative sample of questions:

- There are questions available in every grade (3-8) for both ELA and mathematics. To see them, visit: engageny.org/resource/new-york-state-common-core-sample-questions
- For sample questions on Regents Exams in ELA (Common Core), visit: engageny.org/resource/regents-exams-ela-sample-items
- For sample questions on Regents Exams in Math Common Core, visit:
 - engageny.org/resource/regents-exams-mathematics-geometry-sample-items
 - engageny.org/resource/spring-2014-regents-examination-mathematics-algebra-i-common-core-resources

How are schools, students, and teachers held accountable?

Districts, public schools and charter schools are held accountable for the performance of their students according to federal and state regulations. Districts and schools are assigned a “status” based on their performance and are subject to certain consequences if their performance is not satisfactory. Districts and schools that are high performing or that are making significant improvements in their performance are also identified and rewarded.

Also, in order to make schools and teachers accountable, NYSED has made educational data available and easy to use. At the website data.nysed.gov, the public can become better informed about the achievements or need for improvement in various schools, districts or counties.



TAKE ACTION: Parents can work with school or district curriculum directors to learn about the new curriculum and understand how to support their children to minimize any dips in assessment scores.



Take Action

Parents are their child's best advocates. As a parent and your child's first teacher you should be informed of the assessment and accountability system that is in place in your child's school. Parents and families must be at the table with school leaders and school districts to ensure that testing is implemented well and with enough resources to ensure success.

NYSED should include parents and teachers in thoughtful conversations based on trust, collaboration and respect. For additional details about the state's assessment and accountability plan, please contact the Department at emscassessinfo@nysed.gov.

Here are some questions you might want to ask:

- How many assessments will my child take this school year and where can I access/view the assessment calendar?
- What will happen if my child does not meet proficiency on the new assessments?
- How will the results of tests be used to support my child's learning?
- What can I do, as a parent, to help my child do his or her best?
- How will school evaluations be affected based on results of the new assessments?

Also, be sure to speak with your local school administrators! Ask them to host a parent night in the spring to explain the tests and in the fall to explain test results.

Below is the list of policies and practices that National PTA supports. Check with the NYSED to determine if their policies and practices are closely aligned with those of the PTA.

- National PTA believes that valid assessment does not consist of only a single test score, and that at no time should a single test be considered the sole determinant of a student's academic or work future.
- National PTA supports nationally agreed upon voluntary standards if they are derived by consensus at the state and local levels. Parents must be involved in this process.
- National PTA believes that assessments provide valuable information to parents, teachers and school leaders about the growth and achievement of their students. Furthermore, having annual data on the performance of students can help inform teaching and learning as well as identify achievement gaps among groups of students within a school and among a school district. National PTA believes assessments are essential to ensure that all students receive a high-quality education.

Preparing and Supporting Your Child

- Review the testing calendar and work with your child's school to ensure there will be regular and clear communications from the school on the assessments, the results and how they are used.
- Discuss the new tests with your children. Make sure they feel comfortable and understand why they are taking a test.
- With older children, explain that the new assessments were created to make sure they are on track to succeed after graduation and to identify any issues early enough to give them more support.
- Explain to your child that the tests will initially be more challenging. Tell your child you have high expectations and you and the teachers are there to help every step of the way.
- Review test results with your child and his or her teacher.
- Make sure your child has a comfortable place for studying and is prepared mentally and physically for a test.

Staying informed and involved

- Become familiar with Common Core Learning Standards in New York State: engageny.org/parent-guides-to-the-common-core-standards
- Learn more about the State Tests in ELA and math: engageny.org/resource/parent-resources-grades-3-8-ela-mathematics-tests
- Read all comments written by the teacher on classroom lessons and tests. Ask teachers to explain anything that is unclear and discuss how you can best work together to address areas of improvement for your child.
- Monitor your child's progress and regularly communicate with your child's teachers. If your child needs extra help or wants to learn more about a subject, work with his or her teacher to identify opportunities for tutoring, after-school clubs or other resources.
- Tests are not perfect measures of what a child can do—there are many other factors that might influence a test score. For example, a child can be affected by the way he or she is feeling on test day or the particular classroom setting.
- Meet with your child's teacher as often as possible to discuss his or her progress. Ask for activities to do at home to help prepare for tests and improve your child's proficiency.

Additional resources

- Visit engageny.org for additional information about learning standards and assessments.