

Changes ahead for Grades 3-8 NYS exams in ELA and math

As the spring testing season approaches, state education leaders have announced a series of changes to the state's English language arts (ELA) and math exams for grades 3-8. While the changes are consistent with some of the recommendations made by the governor's Common Core task force, they are also in response to many of the concerns aired by parents and New York educators this past year. Some of the changes involve how the tests are created and how the results are used, while others may impact the testing experience for students. The anticipated changes include:

- **Greater involvement of educators in the test development process** – New York educators were charged with evaluating and selecting assessment questions for use on the spring 2016 exams.
- **Exams will have fewer questions** – Students will read one fewer passage and answer fewer questions overall on all grades 3-8 ELA exams. They will also have four fewer multiple-choice questions to answer on the math tests in all grades.
- **Students will be given as much time as they need to complete the tests** – State education leaders have said that as long as students are working “productively,” they will be given as much time as they need to complete the tests.
- **Begin piloting computer-based exams** – This will be the first year that districts have the option to implement computer-based testing for the grades 3-8 exams. NYSED and many school leaders believe computer-based testing will eventually lead to reduced testing time and faster results.
- **Moratorium on the use of grades 3-8 ELA/math test scores in teacher and principal evaluations** – The state has established a moratorium until the 2019-2020 school year on the use of state-provided growth scores based on the grades 3-8 ELA and math exams for the purposes of teacher and principal accountability. This follows the state’s move last year to prohibit districts from making student promotion/placement decisions solely based on state test scores. Also, until December 31, 2018, school districts cannot include the results of the grades 3-8 ELA and math tests on students’ official transcripts or permanent records.
- **Release of more test questions** – The state plans to release at least 60 percent of the exam questions after the exams are given. Last year, the state released 50 percent of the exam questions in August. Released questions can be used by educators to help inform instruction and improve student learning.
- **New testing vendor** – While the 2016 tests were created by the state’s old test vendor, Pearson, the state is beginning its transition to a new testing vendor, Questar Assessment Inc. Questar will begin offering its first operational exams during the 2016-17 school year. And in keeping with New York’s long-standing tradition of having teachers author the rigorous Regents exams, test questions written by New York educators will appear on the spring 2017 exams for grades 3-8.



More about the 3-8 ELA and math exams

New York students in grades 3-8 take state exams in English language arts (ELA) and math each year, typically in April. On the ELA exam, students are asked to read short passages and answer multiple choice questions or provide textual evidence to explain their answers. They are also asked to write an essay. On the math exam, students are asked to use what they've learned in school to answer multiple-choice questions, as well as show their work on more complex, multi-step problems.