

FAQ FOR FAMILIES ON THE 2013 STATE COMMON CORE TESTS

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i. INTRODUCTION

As part of New York City public schools' work to prepare students for future opportunities, students have been increasingly challenged by the new Common Core standards. These learning standards describe what all students need to know and be able to do to graduate from high school ready for college and careers.

As part of the Common Core, students are reading books with more difficult language and spending more time writing. When students share their opinions, teachers are asking them more often to use evidence to back up their points. In math class, students are developing relevant skills they will be able to apply in future courses and jobs. As students advance through their education and become more independent, these skills will be critical to their success.

In spring 2013, for the first time, the 3rd-to-8th-grade State tests began to assess these skills. We expected these new tests to show where students are on the path to graduating from high school ready for college and careers. This information can be used to help schools broaden students' options for the future—not to punish students, teachers, or schools. With time and support, students will meet this higher bar.

ii. 2013 STATE COMMON CORE TESTS & RESULTS

1. How were the 2013 State tests different from State tests in previous years?

Unlike past year's tests, the 2013 State Common Core tests focused more on the skills students need in order to become ready for college and a good job. Past year's tests included simpler reading passages that were below grade level, but this year's tests included texts that were on grade level and used more difficult language. To do well on the test, students needed to understand what they were reading, not just pick out a particular word or phrase. On the math tests, students had to solve more problems that included multiple steps and could not be answered by one, simple calculation.

These skills are needed for success in college and in professional workplaces. More and more, students are developing these skills in class, and students and teachers will continue to adjust to this higher bar over time.

2. What does it mean if my child earns a score of a Level 1, 2, 3, or 4?

This year, the New York State Education Department changed what it meant to do well on the State tests:

- Level 1: Students are well below proficient in standards for their grade. They demonstrate limited knowledge, skills, and practices as described by the Common Core standards.
- Level 2: Students are below proficient in standards for their grade. They demonstrate partial knowledge, skills, and practices as described by the Common Core standards.

- Level 3: Students are proficient in standards for their grade. They demonstrate sufficient knowledge, skills, and practices as described by the Common Core standards.
- Level 4: Students excel in standards for their grade. They demonstrate more-than-sufficient knowledge, skills, and practices as described by the Common Core standards.

As you discuss this year's results with your child and your child's teachers, remember that scores on State tests are only one measure of student performance, and this year's tests do not measure student progress. How well a student does on classwork, interacting with peers and teachers, and overcoming challenges are also very critical aspects of his or her overall success in school.

3. My child's test scores are significantly lower this year than they were in past years. What do these results mean about my child's academic progress?

A lower score this year does not mean your child went backward. This year's tests were harder than tests given in past years so the scores do not mean the same thing. Also, these tests are new, which means they do not measure progress. The important part to focus on is whether your child is demonstrating the skills and behaviors necessary for college and career readiness. A lower score simply means that there are areas to focus on and improve. Your school is continuing to work your child on those areas.

Please speak with your child's principal and teachers about how your school is supporting students and teachers with the higher demands of the Common Core standards.

4. How do these results impact summer school and promotion decisions? If my child was promoted in June but now has scored Level 1, is his/her promotion in doubt?

Students with the lowest 10 percent of raw (total) scores on the State tests were recommended in June for retention and summer school. Students who were promoted in June will remain promoted, even if their State test results indicate Level 1. Overall, the percentage of students attending summer school was very similar to past years. Note: some students with disabilities and English language learners have promotion standards that are not based on standardized test scores.

The Department of Education has supports in place for all struggling students to get on track to graduate from high school ready for college and careers. For a description of these supports, see question #5.

iii. IMPACT & IMPROVEMENT IN 2013-14

5. What are schools and the Department of Education (DOE) doing to ensure more students are on track to graduate from high school ready for college and careers?

Schools are working on a multi-year strategy to fully introduce the new Common Core standards. From 2005 to 2012, schools doubled the percentage of students who graduated high school ready for college and careers. Our goal is to double that percentage again over the next five years.

We can accomplish this goal by supporting teachers and all students, especially students who are farthest behind:

- Schools will receive twice as much money as last year—now \$10 million—to support small-group tutoring after-school and on Saturdays.
- Hundreds of schools will have new books with higher-level vocabulary words that help students increase their reading comprehension. For math, hundreds of schools will have new resources that focus more deeply on fewer topics—just like high-performing countries around the world.

- To support these changes in the classroom, more than 15,000 teachers received professional development this summer.
- Last year, teachers participated in over 2,700 trainings to learn strategies that can help all students learn more.
- This year, the DOE is more than doubling its investment in teacher development—to more than \$100 million—so that classroom learning continues to improve.

By gradually transitioning to the standards, the DOE is confident that students' results will improve over time.

6. How will this year's State test results impact screened middle and high school admissions?

Schools that include test scores as part of their selection criteria may adjust their criteria based on the students who apply for admission in September 2014. If most students who apply have lower scores as a result of the changes to the State tests, the total scores of students who are admitted to screened schools will be lower than in previous years. Overall, the change in test scores will not affect the number of students who enroll at screened schools.

7. What do these scores mean for teachers and schools?

For teachers and schools, the results from the new State tests provide helpful information about which students need additional support in which subjects. Teachers will not be evaluated by these results. In 2013-14, student performance on State tests will be one of multiple measures that will lead to teachers' ratings. Students' performance will be based on progress, and this year's scores establish the baseline.

For schools, this year's test results will inform the New York City Progress Reports. The distribution of elementary and middle schools' grades, including low grades, will remain consistent. There will not be an increase in the percentage of these schools that receive low grades. The Progress Report will continue to adjust for changes in the tests by measuring each school's performance in comparison to the performance of schools serving similar students.

iv. HOW TO LEARN MORE

8. How can I find out more information about my child's performance on the State tests?

Starting in late August, families can view their child's test results through ARIS Parent Link (arisparentlink.org). Families who forget their password can get help at arisparentlink.org. Parents who have not logged on to ARIS Parent Link before can contact their school.

Additionally, all families are invited to attend Log on & Learn sessions from August 26-30 at a library in each borough and at a DOE office at 49-51 Chambers Street in Manhattan. Families will be able to pick up resources about the Common Core and the new State tests, access and understand their child's results, and discuss how students and teachers are being supported during this transition. See schools.nyc.gov for more information.

At the beginning of the 2013-14 school year, principals will be encouraged to share information about the Common Core standards and changing State tests with their school communities.

Families may review some of their child's responses on the tests. Families may request a review through their child's school. A review must take place in the presence of school personnel. Photocopying test materials is not permitted.