

February 15, 2013

Dear Colleagues,

Over the last few years, thanks to the work you have been doing to transition to the Common Core standards, we have made significant progress toward our goal of ensuring that all of our students are ready to take on the challenges of college and careers.

While we have been preparing for the implementation of the Common Core since before the State adopted the standards in 2010, the changes will start to hit home for many families when elementary and middle school students take State tests aligned to the Common Core this spring.

We anticipate that these new tests will be more difficult to pass, at first. But I believe that this change is important: our new standards set high expectations for student learning. The new State tests will give us a new baseline for measuring our students' growth. They will provide us with information about where students are on the path to graduating from high school prepared for college and a good job—and will support our efforts to do more for our students. With time, support, and hard work from you and your staff, I have full confidence that our students will rise to the challenge.

I am writing today to share some information about what the new State tests will mean for your students, teachers, and school, and to ask you to share this information with your school community:

- **Promotion Policy:** New York City will align promotion standards to the Common Core over time. We expect that the number of students attending summer school this year will be similar to last year. In the past, decisions about summer school were made based on estimates of each student's performance level on the State tests. This year, because the tests are new, we cannot predict how the State will determine performance levels. Instead, we will look at students' raw scores. Students with the lowest scores will be recommended for summer school. This [document](#) describes the changes that will occur this year in more detail and answers questions you may have.
- **Admission to Screened Schools:** Students who earn the highest scores—even if those scores are lower than in past years—will still have access to screened middle and high schools.
- **Teacher Evaluation:** The State's model for measuring teacher growth includes protections to keep teachers' evaluations from being impacted by changes to the tests. Still, until we reach an agreement with the UFT, teachers will continue to be evaluated using the existing Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory system that does not include students' test scores. Although this spring's test scores may not impact evaluations this year, these scores will be factored into teacher evaluations when an agreement is reached.
- **School Accountability:** The Progress Report also controls for changes in State tests by measuring each school's performance in comparison to other schools, keeping our accountability system fair. Schools whose test scores are lower than in past years can continue to receive high Progress Report grades if their students' performance and progress are higher relative to other schools, particularly schools serving similar students. The distribution of elementary and middle schools' grades will also remain fixed, so there will not be an increase in the percentage of schools that receive low grades.

Our school communities need to know about the promise these standards hold to help broaden students' options as they approach adulthood. They also need to know about the new tests and to have their questions addressed. The work you have done over the past several years positions you well for these critical conversations. It is important that your school community understand the challenges ahead and feel confident in your school's ability to manage this change. With the support of your network, please take the following steps:

- **In advance of parent-teacher conferences:**
  - discuss these changes with teachers and provide an opportunity for them to share their concerns.
  - backpack home [this letter](#) to parents of students in grades 3–8; translated versions are available [here](#).
- **During parent-teacher conferences:** make copies of the letter available to families.
- **Before spring recess begins in March:** bring your school community together to share this information and answer questions about the changing tests. These conversations could take place during parent-teacher conferences, curriculum nights, PTA and SLT meetings, or other events.

There are many resources available to support you in this effort, both on the [Common Core Library](#) and on [EngageNY](#). These include sample activities you can use to help parents better understand the contrasts between old and new State tests, PowerPoint presentations that explain the Common Core shifts, and videos and other [materials for parents](#)—including a recording of a webinar I led recently about the Common Core. We will continue to update the Common Core Library with additional resources that I encourage you to share with parents.

Again, as you speak with your school community in the coming weeks, I encourage you to communicate that this spring's tests are new and will be more challenging, and to make clear that you will continue to support your students in reaching these higher expectations that focus on the skills students need to succeed. I appreciate your leadership in this effort.

Sincerely,

Dennis M. Walcott  
Chancellor