

# Public School Press

AUGUST 2013

## HISTORIC MOMENT FOR SCHOOLS

*Push to Raise Standards Intensifies*

### FOCUS ON COLLEGE AND CAREERS

Now comes the biggest test of all.

With the opening of school just weeks away, the effort to prepare the city's 1.1 million students for college and careers is intensifying.

As long expected, the public schools got a jolt to the system last week when the state released the results of the brand-new Common Core exams, which are far harder than the old basic skills tests. The new exams' measure of success is whether a student is on track for college and career success.

This was by design. Millions of American students are graduating without college-level skills, an alarming trend that has prompted 45 states, including New York in 2010, to adopt the new Common Core standards. The standards require students to analyze facts instead of just memorize them, and the exams emphasize the ability to write analytically, read difficult texts and solve complex problems.



Young Scholars' Academy, Brooklyn, NY

As the tests are new, Chancellor Dennis M. Walcott has said the scores won't be used to penalize students, teachers, principals or schools.

Teachers and principals are intensifying their efforts to help students reach the new, higher bar. To prepare, about 15,000 teachers – nearly enough to fill Madison Square Garden – are attending Common Core training sessions this summer.

By the first day of school, more than a million books with higher-level vocabulary words will be delivered to

schools. Overall, the Department of Education has spent \$133 million on resources and professional development for the switch to Common Core.

Chancellor Walcott said that the scores set a new, realistic baseline of what it takes for students to succeed.

"We're not doing our students any favors by keeping the bar low now and letting them fail down the line," he said. "If they're reaching higher standards to graduate, they won't be playing catch-up in college and beyond."



## Straight Talk from the Chancellor

*Schools Chancellor Dennis M. Walcott responds to parents' questions*

### **Why are this year's scores so different from last year's?**

The 2013 state Common Core tests are new and far harder than the old basic skills exams. They measure whether students are on a path for college and careers, not just whether they are on track to graduate from high school. For this reason, they require different, more advanced skills. Students used to pass state tests if they just demonstrated basic proficiency in math and English. Now they only pass if they clear a higher bar that measures whether they are on track for college and jobs.

### **How will this year's scores affect my child, my child's teachers and school?**

Because the tests are new, we've been careful to make sure no one is penalized. Promotion decisions will not be changed based on these results. As teacher evaluation begins in 2013-14, this year's data will not negatively impact teacher growth scores. Progress Report grades will remain consistent for elementary and middle schools—there won't be an increase in the percentage of schools receiving D or F grades. After all, this change is intended to lead to a more accurate understanding of where students are on the path to college and career readiness, not to punish anyone.

### **Why were this year's tests so much harder?**

For years, most educators thought students were doing much better than they actually were. Students learned otherwise when they had to play catch-

up and retake high school classes in college. The new tests are a clearer and more accurate way to gauge student performance. This far higher standard reflects the advanced skills students need to successfully compete in the world after high school.

### **What's the bottom line?**

While these are completely different tests, the differences between the old and new scores tell us that the majority of our students do not yet have the critical-thinking and problem-solving skills needed to succeed in the 21st-century economy. The scores give us a new baseline to build upon. They also tell us that the reforms of this administration are working. On this year's tests, New York City students scored significantly better than students in other major cities throughout the state. Better yet, we closed the gap with the rest of New York State by more than half. This was unimaginable a decade ago.

### **What are you doing to help teachers and schools adjust to the Common Core?**

Since 2010, we have spent more than \$133 million on resources and professional development to train educators in the new curriculum. We expect 15,000 teachers to attend our sessions this summer. We could not have taken this on without the support of our teachers. They are true trailblazers, and I want to thank them for the hard work they are doing to improve instruction for all of our students.

### **How are you preparing my child for next year's tests?**

Teachers can use the results of this year's test to provide your child with help in any areas where he or she is struggling. By the first day of school, more than one million books with higher-level vocabulary words will be delivered to schools across the city. In math, teachers are preparing by focusing more deeply on fewer topics, a lesson we've learned from the top-performing countries around the world.

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The city's future rests on its educational system, and while this change may be difficult in the short-term, I'm confident it will lead to long-term gains for students. I encourage parents to ignore the adults who are using the scores for personal or political purposes, and focus on the students. Ultimately, this change is about them.

### **Have other states seen similar results on the more challenging tests?**

Yes. Kentucky was the first state to take Common Core-aligned tests—and saw a 58 percent drop in elementary school reading and math proficiency. This is what happens at first when you raise the bar, and other states expect to see similar results as they administer their first Common Core-aligned exams. We believe deeply in our students and—with support from teachers—we believe students will meet this new, higher bar.

# National March Toward Higher Standards

New York City is the first major urban school system in the country to take Common Core-aligned state tests. As expected, the results are similar to those of other states that have implemented the harder exams.

In Kentucky, elementary school proficiency dropped 58 percent on the state's first Common Core exams in 2012. Other states that have rolled out more rigorous—though not yet Common Core-aligned—tests have seen similar results. In Florida, there was a 54 percent difference in fourth-grade writing scores compared with the old exam. In Tennessee, elementary school results varied by 67 percent.

Education officials say scores may look like they're falling, but they're not. The new tests are different than the old ones, so it's impossible to make an apples-to-apples comparison. Students aren't doing worse, they're just being tested against a higher bar, said Schools Chancellor Dennis M. Walcott. "The Common

Core sets a new and more accurate standard for success."

Experience has shown that when a school system raises the bar, students will clear it. Massachusetts, which adopted the most rigorous education standards in the nation in 1993, is now outperforming its counterparts in the United States and abroad. In 2011, 8th-grade students scored among the world leaders in math and science, performing at the same level as Shanghai.

In Tennessee, scores have increased for three consecutive years since the state raised standards. The majority of districts have seen improvements in virtually every subject, including math and science.

New York City and State anticipate similar progress over time. "This change may be unsettling, but I am confident it will lead to long-term gains for our students," Walcott said. "We are committed to preparing them to meet the challenges of the global economy."

## In Their Words

"Capitalizing on the scores to benefit adults would relegate a generation of kids to a second-class education, and cheat them out of the futures they deserve. To become distracted by politics would be disastrous for our students."

*Schools Chancellor Dennis M. Walcott,  
New York Daily News, 8/8/13*

"We should absolutely not be alarmed if test scores drop as a result of these more rigorous expectations and higher standards. That's because these new assessments and standards are now aligned to mark and measure what it truly takes to adequately prepare students for the real world."

*U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan,  
New York Daily News, 8/7/13*

"The fact that we're finally being honest about academic achievement is a very positive sign."  
*Joel Klein, former New York City Schools Chancellor, New York Post, 8/7/13*

"Common Core has the power and potential to move American education into the 21st century."  
*Kathryn Wylde, president and CEO of the Partnership for New York City, New York Daily News, 8/7/13*

"Raising the bar is scary and will require all of us invested in improving education to work harder, and even relearn parts of our craft. But I'd rather take that leap now than spend another decade or more being lulled into a false sense of security, only to find my students still aren't ready to be productive citizens."

*Kalyca Thomas, sixth-grade ELA teacher,  
P.S. 241 in the Bronx,  
New York Daily News, 8/7/13*



Young Scholars' Academy, Brooklyn, NY

# LOG ON & LEARN WEEK

Monday August 26 - Friday August 30

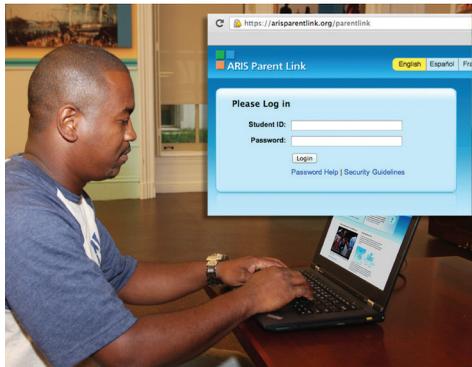
## DID YOUR CHILD TAKE THE NEW YORK STATE GRADES 3-8 ELA AND MATH EXAMS IN SPRING 2013?

**LOG ON** to ARIS Parent Link ([arisparentlink.org](http://arisparentlink.org)) and easily access your child's math and ELA test results

**LEARN** important tips on how to help your child succeed with the Common Core Learning Standards

Need your ARIS Parent Link username and password? Visit a participating public library and speak with Department of Education staff members, who will be helping families learn more about the Common Core standards, the new state tests, and the city's work to prepare more students for college and careers.

Already have your ARIS Parent Link log on information and access to a computer? You are still welcome to attend and learn more about the results.



### Meet with Department of Education Staff

BOROUGH	DATES/TIME	LIBRARY
BRONX	Mon., August 26 3:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.	<b>Parkchester Library</b> 1985 Westchester Ave. (at Pugsley Ave.) Bronx, NY 10462
BROOKLYN	Tues., August 27 3:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.	<b>Sunset Park Library</b> 5108 4th Ave. (at 51st St.) Brooklyn, NY 11220
STATEN ISLAND	Wed., August 28 3:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.	<b>St. George Library</b> 5 Central Ave. (near Borough Hall) Staten Island, NY 10301
MANHATTAN	Thurs., August 29 3:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.	<b>Seward Park Library</b> 192 East Broadway (at Jefferson Street) New York, NY 10002
QUEENS	Fri., August 30 3:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.	<b>Flushing Library</b> 41-17 Main Street (at Kissena Boulevard) Flushing, NY 11355

*Interpretation services will be available. Participating families will receive a free gift while supplies last.*

**Other ways to access your ARIS Parent Link username and password:**

■ **Make an appointment with the parent coordinator or family liaison at your child's school.** To find the phone number to your child's school, call 311 or use the School Search tool on the DOE homepage, [schools.nyc.gov](http://schools.nyc.gov).

■ **Visit the Division of Family and Community Engagement** Monday through Friday between 10:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. at 49 Chambers Street, Room 503, Manhattan, NY 10007.

*Common Core Resources are available at [schools.nyc.gov/ParentsFamilies](http://schools.nyc.gov/ParentsFamilies).*

## NYC Public Schools September Calendar

**MON., SEPT. 2**  
Labor Day  
(schools closed)

**THURS., SEPT. 5 -  
FRI., SEPT 6**  
Rosh Hashanah  
(schools closed)

**MON., SEPT. 9**  
School sessions  
begin for all  
students

*Early dismissal  
for non-District  
75 kindergarten  
Students only*

*Partial school time  
for pre-kindergarten  
public school  
students*

**TUES., SEPT 10**  
First Full day  
for non-District  
75 kindergarten  
students

*Partial school time  
for pre-kindergarten  
public school  
students*

**WED., SEPT., 11**  
First Full day for  
pre-kindergarten  
public school  
students

## Apply for Free Lunch School Lunch to Go Up 25 Cents

More students are expected to qualify for free lunch this school year as the price for school lunch increases by 25 cents, to \$1.75, on September 30. To be eligible for free lunch, parents must complete a meal application. Applications may be submitted online at [nyc.applyforlunch.com](http://nyc.applyforlunch.com) or by searching NYC.gov for "AccessNYC." Copies of the meal application are also available at each school's main office. Applications are due by September 30.

Breakfast remains free for all students.

**For more information on school meals, call 311.**



P.S. 63 Authors' Academy, Bronx, NY