

The latest News from the NYC Department of Education

Public School Press

APRIL 2013

Expectations Rise for Students

New era for teaching and testing

CHANGES REFLECT PARENT CONCERNS

Students Learn to
Think Critically, Solve
Real-World Problems

Scores will Reflect New
Emphasis on College and
Career over Basic Skills

There's something uncommon taking place in the city's public schools.

New York is implementing a far richer curriculum called Common Core. The lessons, and the exams that go hand in hand with them, have students writing more, thinking critically, defending their ideas, and working in teams to solve real-world problems.

The new coursework is harder, and the state exams students in grades 3-8 take this month will be different and more challenging, too. Test scores will reflect that at first. But this year's scores will not be comparable to scores from previous years. This is a new baseline.

We're no longer satisfied with just teaching your child basic skills. We're aiming higher, because we want all of our 1.1 million students to graduate from high school ready to succeed in college, their careers and beyond.



Michael R. Bloomberg
Mayor

Dennis M. Walcott
Chancellor



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Straight Talk from the Chancellor

Schools Chancellor Dennis Walcott responds to parents' questions

Why are my child's tests getting harder? As a parent, I'm tired of hearing that this is going to be great for my kid.

Let's be honest. Tougher tests aren't the problem. The real problem is that too many of our kids aren't prepared to succeed in college or flourish in a career. We're not doing them any favors if we don't challenge them. It's time we raised the bar.

The new curriculum demands that your kids engage their creativity and intellectual curiosity. The goal is to take them beyond the pages of their textbooks and prepare them for the real world.

The new tests will reflect that richer—and more challenging—coursework. When you set a new goal for yourself that feels out of reach, you work harder to meet it. This will be no different. And that's a good thing.

Why am I hearing that my child's test scores are going to drop?

There's no way to know how your child will do until he or she takes the test. But we're now measuring based on completely different, and tougher, criteria. The last tests measured basic skills. The new tests measure your child's ability to get into college or learn a skill after high school graduation.

Some states that have adopted the Common Core have seen lower test scores of over 30 points at first. We have set new benchmarks in the past and our students have always risen to meet them and we think that over time they will do the same with these new standards.

I'm worried about how this will affect promotion and my child's high school applications in September. Are you going to send everyone to summer school?

No. The new tests are part of our transition to the Common Core. And transitions take time. We won't punish students just because their scores have changed on the new and different tests. We expect roughly the same number of students to attend summer school this year as last. 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.

Are you rushing this? How can teachers prepare for Common Core-aligned tests if textbooks are still on the way?

We saw the new state tests coming two years ago, and our teachers have spent that time changing their daily lessons to reflect the Common Core. This includes asking students to read more non-fiction texts and solve math problems with multiple steps, which are the very skills they'll be tested on. To date, we've spent \$125 million preparing teachers for this day, and we have partnered with teachers to create dozens of new curriculum units over the past two years.

Is all the focus on testing helping my child learn?

For years, parents have complained that the state tests were an irrelevant distraction from learning. We listened to your complaints. The Common Core tests are part and parcel of the Common Core curriculum. They're designed to complement one another.

Testing is not a dirty word. It's about evaluating where students are weaker and where they're stronger so their teachers can best judge how to help them. It also helps us assess how good a job your teachers and your school are doing so we can help them improve.

I'm struggling to support my children with their homework. How can I help my child master the more challenging coursework?

We get that. We've worked hard to develop vast parent resources for you. They include sample questions similar to those that your children can expect to see on the new state tests, and "webinars" that I've hosted which explain the transition to the Common Core (for more information, search NYC.gov for Common Core Parent Resources).

If your child is struggling and needs extra help, talk to his or her teacher or to your school's parent coordinator. It's a new era in teaching and testing. I'm committed to helping your child succeed.

**Search NYC.gov
for Common Core
Parent Resources**



What in the World is Common Core?

The Common Core standards have been adopted in New York and 44 other states. They spell out what every student from pre-kindergarten through 12th grade needs to know to graduate from high school ready for college and careers. It's a demanding agenda that starts early and advances, grade by grade, in complexity.

The state math and English Language Arts exams that students in grades 3-8 take this month are the first to

measure how well students meet the Common Core standards. As the samples below show, the state test questions are harder than the ones from previous years.

Adopted in New York and 44 other states

In English, for example, students will be asked to analyze more challenging texts. In math, they will have to complete problems with multiple steps

and explain how they got their answers.

Under the Common Core, the learning environment is more dynamic and intellectually challenging as well. In the old classroom, students sat in rows responding to questions with yes or no answers. In the Common Core classroom, students are writing more, reading more difficult texts, thinking critically, making effective arguments, and working in teams to solve real-world problems.



“Yes, defending your ideas *is* important, but you're still eating your broccoli.”

OLD Grade 4 Math: Actual 2009-10 NY State Test Question

Ms. Upton spends a total of \$42 for 3 sweaters for her children. Each sweater costs the same amount. How much does each sweater cost?

Show your work.

ANSWER \$ 14

$$\begin{array}{r} 14 \\ 3 \overline{)42} \\ \underline{-3} \\ 12 \\ \underline{-12} \\ 0 \end{array}$$

NEW Grade 4 Math: Sample 2012-13 NY State Test Question

Candy wants to buy herself a new bicycle that costs \$240. Candy has already saved \$32, but she needs to make a plan so she can save the rest of the money she needs. She decides to save the same amount of money, x dollars, each month for the next four months.

Part A: Write an equation that helps Candy determine the amount of money she must save each month.

Equation $32 + 4X = 240$

Part B: Solve the equation to find the amount of money she must save each month to meet her goal of buying a bicycle.

Show your work. *Every month for 4 months she has to save X dollars.*

ANSWER: \$ 52

$$\begin{array}{l} 32 + 4X = 240 \\ \underline{-32} \\ 0 \end{array} \quad \begin{array}{l} 4X = 208 \\ \underline{4} \\ 4 \end{array} \quad \begin{array}{l} X = \frac{208}{4} \\ \underline{4} \\ 4 \end{array} \quad \begin{array}{r} 52 \\ 4 \overline{)208} \\ \underline{-20} \\ 08 \\ \underline{-8} \\ 0 \end{array}$$

OLD Grade 8 English Language Arts: Actual 2009-10 NY State Test Question

The author of the passage says that he lost Rufus as a useful working animal during a summer heat spell. Explain why the author makes this comment about his dog.

Use details from the passage to support your answer.

- Text is relatively simple at a fifth grade reading level.
- Students are asked to find details from the text to support a straight forward comment made by the author.

To see the original passage, please visit <http://on.nyc.gov/12UBfFH>.

NEW Grade 8 English Language Arts: Sample 2012-13 NY State Test Question

Describe how the author's attitude toward the doll symbolizes her changing attitude toward learning words throughout the story. Use two details from the passage to support your answer.

Write your answer in complete sentences.

- Passage is from autobiography of Hellen Keller and is more complex (e.g., sentence structure and vocabulary).
- Students need to understand the concept of symbolism and develop their own interpretation of the text.
- Requires critical thinking.

To see the original passage, please visit <http://on.nyc.gov/12UBfFH>.

This Spring We're Aiming Higher

This spring, state exams for students in grades 3-8 will be different and more challenging. And test scores will reflect that at first.

We're raising standards. Under the new Common Core curriculum, students will be writing more. Thinking critically.

Defending their ideas. Working in teams to solve real-world problems.

We're not satisfied with just teaching your children basic skills. We want them prepared for college and a career.



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