



November 28, 2012

Dear Colleagues,

The transition to the Common Core standards represents an opportunity to strengthen instruction, and as I visit classrooms across the City I see teachers and school leaders making the most of this opportunity. I have observed students participating in rigorous, text-based discussions and listened to teachers ask higher-order questions, and I have heard over and over again from principals about how seriously teachers are engaging with the standards during this transition period.

As you know, this spring's New York State English language arts (ELA) and math tests for grades 3-8 will align with the Common Core standards, and we expect the tests to be significantly more challenging. At least initially, students' scores may go down. However, the richer tests we will be seeing over the next few years can help move us toward stronger teaching that emphasizes cognitively demanding tasks and assignments.

To support educators' understanding of these changes, the New York State Education Department recently released ELA and math [testing guides](#). These documents describe the content changes at each grade level and provide guidance about how the Common Core standards will be assessed this spring. In ELA, for instance, the tests will include authentic texts that require students to read critically and to write using text-based evidence. In math, the tests will reflect the major work of the grade and the instructional shifts requiring fluency, application, and conceptual understanding.

As in other situations that involve significant change, this combination of new tests and potentially lower scores may create anxiety in your school community. As you communicate with your staff, students, and families, I encourage you to acknowledge the transition period that we are currently in. Continue to have your teachers focus on developing more rigorous lesson plans that will better prepare our students for college and careers. Our incremental approach—starting with the 100-school pilot in 2010 and leading to last year's and this year's citywide instructional expectations—has tapped into great energy around the City, and as that work has broadened and deepened this year we are seeing instruction shift accordingly. As we continue to implement the standards, I encourage you to utilize the resources we have made available:

- **Instructional Leads:** In August, I wrote to you about [designating 2-8 Instructional Leads](#) and using the allocation we were providing to support their work; this funding can create time for your team to advance the 2012-13 instructional expectations in your school.
- **Achievement coaches:** Your network team members can help connect you with resources beyond your school and professional development opportunities. Work with your achievement coach to move your school's instructional priorities forward.
- **Common Core Library:** We have posted examples of how to shift instruction to support the types of learning that the new tests will assess. Please encourage your staff to review these materials, including 55 instructional resources and two [day-by-day guides](#) of how to map *Everyday Math* and *Impact Math* to the Common Core standards.

I thank you for your commitment to this challenging work.

Best,

Shael Polakow-Suransky