

TIPS FOR TALKING WITH YOUR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILD ABOUT THE COMMON CORE STANDARDS & CHANGING STATE TESTS

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Over the past couple of years, New York City schools have been transitioning to the new Common Core Learning Standards, which mean more challenging work for students in class. This spring, for the first time, State reading and math tests for grades 3–8 will reflect the new standards. The tests will measure whether students at each grade level are on track to succeed in college and be prepared for a good job. Because no one knows your child the way you do, we encourage you to take some time over the next few weeks to speak with your child about these changes. This guide is designed to help with these conversations, similar to discussions taking place around the City among teachers and within schools this winter and spring.

How should I talk with my child about the new standards?

- Begin a conversation by asking your child about what he or she is doing in school. What subjects or assignments are most interesting? Which ones seem harder this year? What feels different from the work she has done in the past?
- Let your child know that all students in New York City are being challenged this year to complete more difficult work in class. The work is getting harder because it's intended to prepare them to be successful in the world beyond school.
- Explain to your child that most of the jobs she will want when she grows up will require her to be a good reader and writer. She will need to be able to do math problems that come up in the real world and use evidence to make strong arguments that convince others.
- Let him know that when he faces schoolwork that seems really hard, it is important to keep trying and not give up. Reassure him that it's okay to struggle and that you believe he can rise to this challenge. By continuing to work hard, he will be prepared to do this more difficult work and be successful in life.

How should I talk with my child about the new State tests?

- Ask your child if her teachers or classmates have been talking about the upcoming State tests. Ask her if she has any concerns or thoughts she wants to share with you.
- Explain that this April, all students in New York City in 3rd through 8th grade will take State tests in reading and math that may be more difficult than tests they have taken in the past.
- Let your child know that these tests are meant to be really hard. That's because they are designed to measure whether students are on track for college and a good job when they finish high school.
- Explain that these tests will help your child's teachers understand what your child has learned so far this year and what he still needs to learn. That way, his teachers can make sure he is on his way to being whatever he wants to be when he grows up.
- If your child is still learning English, let her know that her teachers understand the new tests may be especially difficult for her. Teachers of English language learners will support their

students to learn English as well as the content so that they are ready for these tests. Reassure your child that you and her teachers believe in her and will help her to get there.

- Remind your child that when he faces a challenge, it's important not to get frustrated but to work through it and keep trying.
- Reassure your child that you will support her no matter how she does on the test. Let her know you are confident that if she keeps working hard, she will succeed.

How can I help my child do his or her best on test day?

- Acknowledge that taking tests makes a lot of students feel anxious. Ask your child how he feels about taking the tests and listen to his concerns.
- Make sure your child has a healthy dinner and a good night's sleep the night before the test and a nutritious breakfast that morning.
- Ensure your child packs her bag the night before the tests so that she isn't scrambling to get ready in the morning.
- If your child has an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) that includes testing accommodations, reassure your child that the accommodations will be in place to help him succeed.
- Suggest to your child that during the tests, if he feels nervous, he should:
 - Close his eyes and quietly count to 10; take deep breaths and try again.
 - Think about what he has learned throughout the year; consider how he approached similar questions he encountered in class.
 - Remember that you believe in him and that you know he can take on this challenge.

What should I say to my child after the tests?

- Ask your child how she thought the tests went. Ask which types of questions were easy, which were difficult, and why. Use questions like, "What did you learn?" "What surprised you?" "Was any of it tricky to read?" Understanding what was hard about a test, and why, is one of the most important parts of the learning process for you, your child, and her teachers.
- Share what you learned through this conversation with your child's teachers when the test results come out. Ask how you can continue to help your child at home.
- Remind your child that the tests are meant to help his teachers support his learning, and that you will also support him in learning what he needs to know and be able to do.
- If the test results, combined with your child's class work, demonstrate that your child needs extra help, reassure your child that you will work with her school to come up with a plan to get her the support she needs to be successful.