Department of Education
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Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)
Student Participation in Grades 3-8 New York State Tests
Parent Guide

The federal No Child Left Behind Act, which is in effect through June 30, 2016, requires that schools annually administer State exams in English language arts and mathematics in grades 3–8, and in science at least once during grades 3–5 and 6–9. In accordance with these requirements, once a year, public school students in grades 3–8 throughout the state take assessments administered for their grade levels in these subjects. In addition to fulfilling federal and state mandates, these exams also help gauge year-to-year progress for students and schools. Below is a list of questions and responses that you may have about these exams.

When are the State tests for grades 3–8?
In 2016, the ELA exams will be administered on April 5-7, with make-up exams on April 8, 11-12. The math exams will be administered on April 13-15, with make-up exams on April 18-20. A complete test schedule by grade level is available on the online school calendar.

How are test results used?
State assessments are an important part of a student's core educational program. They provide an evaluation of student mastery of content and skills in various courses of study, serve as a tool for measuring the degree to which students are on track to graduate high school college- and career-ready, and help shape future instruction. Along with student work on classroom assignments, projects, essays, and assessments, State test results give teachers important information about where students are on their path towards college and careers.

The New York City Department of Education uses test results to assess how schools are performing and to identify areas where schools can be better supported. In addition, some DOE programs and middle and high schools use State test results as one component of decisions about admissions; students without State test results can still apply for these programs but may need to take additional steps (see below for more information). These State tests will not have grade promotion consequences for students or formal evaluation consequences for teachers or principals until at least the 2019-2020 school year. Any metrics based on these assessments will be used for developmental, or formatives, purposes only.

Is there a provision for parents to opt their children out of State tests or request an alternative evaluation?
With the exception of certain areas in which parental consent is required, such as Committee on Special Education (CSE) evaluations for students with disabilities and certain federally-funded surveys and analyses specified under the federal Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment, there is no provision in the State statute or regulation allowing parents to opt their children out of State tests or request an alternative evaluation.

What should a principal do if parents express an interest in opting their children out of the State exams?
The principal should offer to meet with the parents to discuss their concerns. The principal may want to explain that this year the State has made changes to the exams in response to legitimate concerns from parents and educators over previous years' tests, including greater teacher involvement with test development activities. This year's exams will have fewer questions and will not have a time limit for students as long as they are working productively. These updates[1] to the historical exam and

[1] http://www.bmcsd.org/images/TestChanges2016.pdf

administration guidelines will enable students to work at their own pace and should alleviate testing stress for students and parents.

The principal may want to explain that a student's test scores will be only one of a number of factors that evaluate his or her academic progress and that these scores will not be weighed more heavily than other factors such as class grade, projects, and classroom activities. The principal may also want to describe the impacts of opting out of the State exams (as detailed below). If, after consulting with the principal, the parents still want to opt their child out of the exams, the principal should respect the parents' decision and let them know that the school will work to the best of their ability to provide the child with an alternate educational activity (e.g., reading) during testing times. The parent and the principal should maintain a written record of this conversation.

What happens during test administration if a student is absent?
If a student is absent during test administration, the school will administer the test during the make-up period. If a student is also absent during the make-up period, the student will not be tested.

What happens during test administration if a student refuses to take a State exam?
If a student is in school and refuses to take a State test, the school will bubble in "Refused Entire Test" on the answer document for each of three days of administration. The school will make every effort to arrange for another instructional activity, such as reading or completing another project or assignment.

What happens after test administration if a student refuses to participate in State testing?
Students who do not participate will not receive a score, similar to students who were present for the exam but did not respond to any questions or for students whose exams were invalidated as a result of an administrative error.

For promotion decisions: Throughout the year, schools assess student progress toward attaining Common Core Learning Standards. Students are assessed holistically, using multiple measures, such as State test scores, grades, report cards, samples of student writing, projects, assignments, and other performance-based student work. While State test scores may be considered, they may not be the primary or major factor in promotion decisions. Students may not be penalized or retained in the same grade solely for not taking a State test.

If the school determines there is enough evidence that a student is making sufficient progress in math and ELA (and if the student has passed all core courses in grade 8), then the student will be promoted.

- If the school determines that the student has not made sufficient progress in math and ELA, based on multiple pieces of evidence from the school year, the school will complete a promotion portfolio in order to determine the student's readiness for the next grade. The promotion portfolios align to the Common Core, represent an authentic assessment of student learning, and include flexibility for schools to incorporate assessments and student work completed throughout the year. If the student's promotion portfolio demonstrates that the student has met promotion standards, then the student will be promoted to the next grade level. Schools may not require students to complete a promotion portfolio simply because a student does not take the State test.

For more information about the promotion policies, including the promotion criteria for English language learners and students with IEPs, see "What to Expect: Promotion and Summer School."[2]

For enrollment decisions: Due to the NYS law[3] passed in March 2014, no DOE school or program may use State test scores as the sole, primary, or major factor in their admissions policies. The processes described below are situations where State test scores are used as one of multiple criteria for admissions.

Grades 3 and 4 test scores may be used as one component of Gifted and Talented placement in grades 4 and 5. To understand how students without test scores will be accommodated for admissions decisions, please reach out to G&T Admissions at ESEnrollment@schools.nyc.gov. Additionally, some middle and high schools have academically screened programs that use test scores as one of several criteria for admissions, as described in the Middle School Directories[4] and High School Directory[5]. Students without test scores are eligible to apply to these programs, and schools have been instructed to develop policies around how to account for missing test scores in admissions decisions. Please reach out to schools directly to learn more about their individual policies; if you have difficulties obtaining admissions policies from a school, please reach out to the school's Family Leadership Coordinator.

For State and federal school accountability: Under State and federal accountability rules, the State measures each school's rate of participation on State tests. Regardless of the reason (i.e., absence or refusal), if less than 95% of a school's students or one or more of its subgroups of students (e.g., less than 95% of black students, students with disabilities, etc.) take the math or ELA assessments, the school is designated having failed to make "Adequate Yearly Progress" (AYP) for that school year. This leads to the following:

- After three years of missing AYP for the same subgroup, a school can be identified as a Local Assistance Plan (LAP) school. LAP schools are not considered "in good standing" and are generally subject to additional reporting and self-review requirements.
- Schools that do not meet the participation rate criteria are not eligible to be considered "Reward school" status, which highlights schools identified as demonstrating high performance or high progress relative to other schools in the State.

How will this year's State test results impact teacher and principal ratings and NYCDOE school accountability?

In accordance with State law, student performance on State 3-8 ELA and math tests will not be included in teachers' and principals' annual professional performance review ratings. Any metrics based on State test

[2] http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/64DAAB5A-BED4-4F9C-B9ED-396D6D87FC25/0/Acpolicypromoforfamilies.pdf

[3] http://intranet.nycboe.net/NR/rdonlyres/E9E239C9-8C85-47DC-827D-DEA10CFD5D9D/0/305Generalpowersandduties.pdf

[4] http://schools.nyc.gov/ChoicesEnrollment/Middle/Resources/default.htm

[5] http://schools.nyc.gov/ChoicesEnrollment/High/Resources/default.htm

results will be included in teachers' and principals' non-transitional ratings, which are used for advisory purposes only. This year's test results may be included in school performance measures presented in the NYCDOE's school quality guides. For more information, please visit http://schools.nyc.gov/Offices/advance/.

My child's middle school received approval to "double test" students in accelerated math courses and administer both the State math test and a math Regents exam to these students. Can parents of these students decide not to have their children take the State math test?

Yes. Even if a school received approval to double-test students in accelerated courses, parents can still choose not to have their children take the State math test if they are taking a math Regents exam. Prior to the administration of state exams, parents should speak with principals about their decision not to take the State test. The school will make every effort to arrange for another instructional activity, such as reading or completing another project or assignment. Additional information about the double testing waiver is available here[6].

[6] http://intranet.nycboe.net/NR/rdonlyres/22772F24-BFE0-46DF-874C-1362CBA2B716/0/Acpolicydoubletestingwaiver2015.pdf