

Dear Teachers,

Since I became New York's Commissioner of Education in 2015, I have traveled more than 50,000 miles, crisscrossing the state listening to concerns from teachers and parents about the Grades 3-8 ELA and Math Tests. As a result of hearing these concerns, the State Education Department made significant changes to the tests. The tests now have fewer questions, were developed with greater teacher involvement and are untimed. Also, like last year, the State Education Department will return instructional reports to teachers by the end of the school year and release at least 75-percent of the test questions.

We continue to work to improve our testing program. As we look to establish new learning standards in ELA and Math - a process led by a committee of 130 teachers and parents - we will make more changes to the tests in future years that are responsive to concerns we have heard from teachers and parents.

Here is a summary of the changes we made to the tests last year that will be continued this year.

Fewer Test Questions

The number of test questions on the 2017 tests will be the same as the 2016 tests. Each of the 2016 Grades 3-8 ELA Tests had one less reading passage and fewer questions than tests from previous years. The 2016 Math Tests also had fewer questions.

Greater Teacher Involvement

Hundreds of New York State educators were involved in creating and reviewing the 2017 assessments. Beginning in fall 2015 and going forward, a greater number of New York State teachers has been -and will continue to be- involved in the review of all test questions and construction of test forms. Teachers from across the State gathered in Albany throughout the summer and fall of 2016 to evaluate and select questions for the 2017 tests. For the first time ever, New York State teachers will write the test questions for the Grades 3-8 ELA and Math Tests. These questions will first be used on the 2018 tests.

Faster Results for Teachers

Like last year, the State Education Department plans to have instructional reports returned to teachers by the end of the school year and release at least 75-percent of the test questions.

Untimed Testing

The 2017 Grades 3-8 ELA and Math Tests will be untimed so students who need more time to demonstrate what they know and can do will be able to work at their own pace. The 2016 tests were also untimed. In general, this means that as long as students are working productively, they will have as much time as they need to complete their test, within the confines of the regular school day.

Improved Resources for Parents

Also like last year, the 2017 Score Reports for parents will feature the updated clearer design and more information about what students should know and be able to do at each grade level. These will be ready over the summer.

More information is available online:

<http://www.p12.nysed.gov/assessment/ei/2017/2017-handout-for-parents-3-8-tests.pdf>

<http://www.p12.nysed.gov/assessment/ei/2017/2017-faq-for-parents-3-8-tests.pdf>

My goal is to be sure that you know about and understand the changes to the Grades 3-8 ELA and Math Tests. I hope these resources and information are helpful.

Sincerely,

MaryEllen Elia
Commissioner of Education