



# Peekskill City School District

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## State Testing Guidelines 2014-2015 School Year

The implementation for the Common Core Curriculum, along with the State Assessment Program, has spurred many conversations and questions regarding state testing. In an effort to help clarify and respond to those questions, the district has compiled a list of Frequently Asked Questions. Please see the below list of questions and our responses. If you have further questions or concerns, please contact your school principal.

### FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- **Will these scores be part of my child's permanent record?**

No. New state law now forbids test results to be included in a student's permanent record. The results will only be released if requested by a parent, such as when a student transfers to another district.

- **Do these tests force teachers to "teach to the test"?**

Teachers can no longer "teach to the test." New assessment questions require the application of higher-level thinking strategies to the material provided in the questions. Teachers may utilize similar strategies in modules they teach, but they cannot teach to specific questions. Teaching is now more about applying thinking strategies to understand Common Core Curriculum.

- **Do the test questions include items the students haven't yet learned?**

Since we do not see the tests in advance, it is impossible to know for sure. Each year, however, as teachers become more comfortable with the new curriculum, they are covering more material. In addition, this year we will have access to approximately 75% of the test questions, so teachers will be able to align curriculum even further. Our instructional coaches note that the state assessment questions look very similar to the assessment questions being assigned in our classrooms every day.

- **Common Core will be going away soon, so why should my child bother taking the test?**

It is not our understanding that the Common Core Curriculum will go away very soon. As teachers become more familiar with the curriculum and receive additional training and materials, confidence continues to rise. In addition, we are confident that our commitment to

balance literacy will better prepare our students, particularly at the primary level, thus better preparing them for high school and beyond.

**• What exactly does the school and Administration do (if anything) with these test score results?**

While the state has attempted to tie test results to teacher, administrator, and school evaluations, that impact has been minimal. Our teachers and administrators want test results in order to improve instruction for all students. By analyzing areas of strengths and weaknesses both for individual students and entire classes, time on specific objectives and standards can be better managed. By seeing which classes have the highest results, best practices can be shared with other classrooms to maximize learning for all. This year, we will have access to 75% of the test questions, which will also increase our ability to target specific skills in their order of importance. Moreover, we are committed to improving literacy, PreK-12, and we presently have some of the top notch leading Educators in our nation working directly with our teachers.

**• If teachers across the state are against Common Core, why should parents support it?**

Teachers through time have had different opinions on almost all areas of curriculum and instruction, and this is also true about Common Core. When Peekskill introduced balance literacy instructional strategies we wanted to see in every classroom, many teachers were not familiar with the changes. Almost all teachers now support these strategies and in classrooms where they are most often used are seeing some of our highest achievement results. Common Core Standards are not that different from our previous standards. The higher level thinking strategies used to deliver the standards seem to be the biggest area of change.

**• Do these tests create anxiety and make students nervous about scoring well on the assessments?**

The District is actively taking on the issue of “test anxiety.” Every day student is working on the same types of questions in their classrooms that they will have to answer on state tests. There is no need for teachers to discuss the tests or in any way pressure students prior to taking these tests. The fact is students cannot “study” for these tests. We are actively communicating this message across the district. Test days will be just other “school days” with a few more assessments than the average day.

**• Are teachers heavily evaluated based on test results and is this fair?**

Teachers are most heavily evaluated based upon their day to day classroom performance. Sixty percent of a teacher’s evaluation score comes from their classroom observations by administrators. Currently, only twenty percent of an evaluation score is related to state test results, and only twenty percent of our total teaching staff are connected to Grade Three through Eight testing. With very high percentages of our teachers rated effective and highly effective, testing is not significantly impacting their evaluations. Certainly “fairness” needs to be addressed in numerous ways, as the system is significantly flawed.

**• Should elementary school students have to take standardized, high stakes tests?**

Elementary students have been taking standardized tests for many years in order to measure their progress. They are in fact answering these very same types of questions in their classrooms every day. In some cases, our teachers and instructional coaches have noted, the questions are almost exactly the same questions that appear on the tests. We use the assessments to see how well our students are performing and how they compare to students in other schools and districts.

**• Is it true that “special” classes (art, music, physical education and library), sports, and other programming have been cut back to make more time for test prep?**

This is simply not true. Peekskill is firmly committed to the arts, athletics and extra-curricular activities as well as academics. In fact, we have added music and theater to our program. We continue to offer a full range of specials and we will continue to do so. Students who qualify for academic intervention or special education services may receive additional intensive time in core subjects, but no programs in Peekskill have been cut back due to these tests.

**• Are these exams fair for students with learning or language challenges?**

We do agree with the need for a more “level playing field.” If students cannot read a test or have not been exposed to certain testing levels or areas of instruction, it is unfair to test them under the same set of rules and circumstances. Many of these students are also taking on higher level tasks in their classrooms and are rising to the challenge by demonstrating success on the assessments. We also support the New York State Waiver Request to the Federal Government to modify the testing conditions for these students.

**• If I decide to opt out of the state test, what will my child do during the testing time?**

In accordance to the regulations procedure, there are no provisions for “opting out.” A student whose family decides will not take state assessment is considered a test refusal. Consequently, we will make every effort for that child to have reading and/or literacy time. We will not be able to have a parallel schedule.

**• If my child refuses to take the test, does it have an impact on district funding?**

Many districts and administrators are weighing in with different points of view. The fact is we do not know how all of this controversy will affect funding. The Governor has made it clear he wants to see results attached to funding, but the arguments are far from being settled.

**• If my child refuses to take the test, does it have an impact on the teacher’s evaluation?**

We do not know the answer to this question. There are rules and regulations related to participation rates and how student scores are assigned, but the mechanics are unclear. Again, the Governor has made his position clear that test results should be tied to evaluations, but the matter is far from settled.

- **AIS services are based on my child’s score on the test. If they don’t have a score, can they still be placed in AIS?**

A number of protocols are being used to determine AIS services. Aside from the state test, we utilize regular monitoring of student growth. Lack of appropriate progress or growth can lead to AIS services, as well as a recommendation by building administration.

- **If my child does not take the test, what is the “score” they receive?**

Students who do not take the test are recorded as “Not tested.”