



New York State Assessment Grades 3-8 ELA and/or mathematics Opt-out Frequently Asked Questions

What is the History of the Grades 3-8 Assessments in ELA and Mathematics?

The first administration of the Grade 4 and Grade 8 tests in ELA and mathematics occurred in 1999. They were designed to identify students who may be at risk for not meeting the Standards so that schools could put Academic Intervention Plans in place. In 2002, the No Child Left Behind Legislation was passed by the United States Congress and signed into Law by President Bush. In 2006, the first administration of ELA and mathematics tests in grades 3-8 was mandated. In 2014, the first administration of the Grades 3-8 ELA and math tests that were aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards were administered. This is what is currently in place.

Why are they given?

The tests are given as a mandate associated with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). This law was signed by President Obama on December 10, 2015 and replaced the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

Are they required?

Yes. The ESSA requires that tests be administered in ELA and math in grades 3-8. Each state has the authority and responsibility for how the tests are designed and with whom they contract with to design them. Thus, all public schools in New York State are required to administer the Grades 4-8 tests in both ELA and mathematics.

How long are the tests?

The New York State Common Core Assessments in English Language Arts and mathematics range from 400-520 minutes in length.

We have been informed by the New York State Education Department that the 2016 ELA and math tests will be untimed this year and that the tests will be shorter. A January 2016 memo noting the changes can be found here:

<http://www.p12.nysed.gov/assessment/ei/2016/changes2016grades3-8ela-math-tests.pdf>

How are the results of the tests used?

To the extent that we can, we use the results to inform the teaching and learning process. The test items released to us are used as part of our data analysis to determine how our students performed on a particular test item, concept, and/or standard. In the past we had access to the entire test and now we have access to about 50% of the items.

Students who perform below a specific cut point will have mandated Academic Intervention Services. This information is rarely a surprise to us and in almost all cases; those students are already scheduled for support. Recently, there have been increased instances where classroom achievement outperforms the student's performance on the State tests. In those cases, our building principals work with teachers and parents to make informed decisions about the best path to support each child's growth.

No student is ever denied support or provided extension and/or enrichment opportunities once the need is identified.

How are the scores reported?

The Board of Regents has disallowed Districts from placing student performance on the grades 3-8 ELA and/or math tests on your child's transcript. The results are never used as a component of your child's grades and will not appear on his or her report cards.

How are the results of the tests used to evaluate my child's teacher?

This has been a very controversial issue for many people. For the past several years, teachers and principals in New York State have had several versions of an evaluation system called the Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR). Teachers in grades 3-8 and all principals have had 20% of their annual evaluation tied to student growth on state assessments. This score is provided to Districts by the New York State Education Department. This year, the Board of Regents placed a moratorium on this practice which will continue through the 2018-2019 school year. We will still receive a score for the teacher and principal, but it will not be used as a component of their final evaluation.

Teachers whose courses end in a Regents exam have the same requirement but have not received a state provided growth score. Rather, those scores were, and will continue to be, determined locally.

What is the Opt-Out Movement

The Opt-out movement is generally a parent-led effort designed to opt their children out of taking the grades 3-8 tests in ELA and mathematics. There are a wide variety of reasons why parents make this determination for their children.

What is the District's position on the Opt-out Movement?

Our Superintendent, Dr. Giarrizzo and the elected members of the Board of Education take an oath to administer the law and regulations of the Commissioner of Education. Therefore, we have an obligation to administer the assessments to the students of Pelham as prescribed by the New York State Education Department. However, we also respect the decisions that parents make for their children and will accommodate those students whose parents choose to not have their children take the assessments.

We request that the decision to opt-out be made in advance of the assessment date so that accommodations can be made for your child. Children who do not take the tests are required to attend school, and read and/or work silently. As either the large majority or the entire school is engaged in a testing situation, they are supervised and not permitted to socialize with others.

Does the District face repercussions if too many students opt-out of taking the assessments?

The answer here remains somewhat unclear. The Federal Government has taken the position that at least 95% of students in New York State must take the exam or Title I funding to the state may be at risk. New York State also requires that 95% of our students participate both on each grade level and as a school. Failure to meet this 95% requirement MAY lead to a reduction in Title I funding for the Pelham Public Schools. Our District's allocation for 2015-2016 is \$89,296. If a school fails to meet the 95% participation rate in ELA and Math for three consecutive years, NYSED would require that a Local Assistance Plan (LAP) be developed by the District to address student participation.

What is the District's position on Assessment?

The Board of Education and administration of the Pelham Public School feel strongly that assessment is an essential component of the teaching and learning process. We believe that any assessment should be reflective of the learning that takes place in your child's classroom and provide information to teachers about what your child knows and is able to do that is based upon what they have been taught. We also believe that effective assessment does not need to be long to accomplish these goals.

As a District, we believe that if we teach the curriculum well, the tests will take care of themselves and we discourage unnecessary test preparation. While there is value in preparing students about what to expect including test format, timing, specific types of questions, these kinds of activities should be limited in scope and to the extent feasible, embedded within the general curriculum.

What should I do if I have more questions?

Please contact your child's building principal with additional questions that you may have. You are also welcome to contact Dr. Steven Garcia, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction, and Personnel or our Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Peter Giarrizzo.