

# Island Park Union Free School District

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Dear Parents & Families,

In a few weeks, the New York State Grades 3-8 English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics Tests will be administered to students. The ELA exam will be administered on April 2<sup>nd</sup> and April 3<sup>rd</sup> and the Mathematics exam will be administered on May 1<sup>st</sup> and May 2<sup>nd</sup>.

Over the past few years, the New York State Education Department (NYSED) has instituted several encouraging changes to the annual ELA and math testing program that I would like to share with you. Below you will find a summary of the changes that were made to the Grades 3-8 English Language Arts and Mathematics Tests as well as Teacher and Principal Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) over the past several years.

## Changes to the NYS Testing Program

- **Fewer testing sessions and questions.** Last year, the Grades 3–8 ELA and Math Tests were reduced from three test sessions per subject to only two sessions per subject, meaning each subject originally designed to be 90 minutes in length on each day is now designed to be the same length over two days. The tests now **have fewer questions**, lessening fatigue for students and better enabling them to demonstrate what they know and are able to do.
- **Despite their design, the tests continue to be untimed so students who are still working on their exams will be allowed to continue to work at their own pace.**
- **Test questions were reviewed and written by New York State Teachers, not a testing corporation.** Hundreds of New York State educators were involved in creating and reviewing questions for 2019 Grades 3-8 ELA and math Tests and selecting the questions for the test forms.

## Changes to Teacher and Principal Evaluation/APPR

- **Student performance on the 2019 Grades 3-8 ELA and Mathematics Tests will have no employment-related consequences for teachers and principals evaluations.** This means the evaluations of teachers and principals in New York State public schools will not be affected by the results of the 2019 Grades 3-8 ELA and math Tests.

## Release of Test Questions and Instructional Reports

- **Test questions and instructional reports will be released before the end of the school year.** This means teachers and principals will review all relevant data from the tests to help them evaluate current instructional programs and practices as well as address students' needs during the last month of school. This same data will continue to be used in September by students' new teachers.

The demands of today's world require that our students learn and master many skills. Today's students are learning and growing in an ever-changing knowledge-based, highly technological world which necessitates that students master higher-order thinking skills and that they are able to see the relationships among seemingly diverse concepts. In the Island Park UFSD we pride ourselves on offering students many instructional, extra-curricular, and recreational opportunities to practice and hone in on these crucial 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills. In addition, we focus on other important skills needed for college and the workplace such as teamwork, collaboration, and character building, traits that cannot be measured by traditional tests.

As a school district, we also acknowledge the need to measure student achievement, growth, and progress using multiple measures of student performance rather than a test score on a single assessment. We understand and value the approach of using multiple measures of student performance and use the scores from the NYS Testing Program as only one of the several measures used to help us gauge each student's performance, achievement and to measure the impact of our instructional programs and practices.

### **How Test Data Are Used**

**Data from the NYS Testing Program is only one of several measures used by the District to assess student performance as well as the effectiveness of instructional programs and practices. Test questions and instructional reports will be released by NYSED on or around June 1. This early date gives teachers and principals time to use the information before the end of the school year in the following ways:**

- Teachers and the principal identify achievement gaps that exist among different student populations.
- Teachers and the principal examine current district curricula to identify achievement gaps and the resources required to fill each gap.
- Teachers learn about each student's strengths and for the purpose of individualizing instruction.
- Teachers determine strategies that are working well and those which are not.
- Teachers identify the skills that individual students and groups of students have mastered and, therefore, do not require re-teaching; in this way, instructional time can be spent targeting skills that are still developing.
- Student data is stored in our Instructional Data Warehouse (IDW), the district's repository for student data collected from multiple sources and organized for analyses and reporting. The IDW provides a wide variety of reports for all NYS assessments so that students' longitudinal growth can be measured over several years' time. In this way, trends that emerge over time can also be corrected.

### **How Parents Can Use the 2019 Grades 3-8 ELA and Math Test Results**

**We anticipate NYSED will make test results available in August along with redesigned score reports. Shortly after the release of the results, parent reports will be uploaded into the "Student Portfolio" section of Parent Portal.** The Commissioner says the updated reports will be easier to understand and provide more information about what students should know and be able to do at each grade level. We encourage parents to use these reports in the following ways:

- Use your child's score report as one measure to guide a discussion with your child's teacher(s) about additional supports that may be helpful in school, as well as ways to support your child's learning at home.
- See State test results as just one measure of your child's achievement. Use the information from the reports to compare progress and achievement against report card grades which are cumulative (based on many factors over time, including attendance, work habits, class participation, homework, quizzes, tests,

- and other instructional activities) and establish the picture of a child's true academic achievement.
- Use the information to compare your child's performance to other students across the State, especially with respect to specific skills and concept areas. For example, the ELA report gives scores for both reading and writing; the math report gives scores for the key math concepts for your child's grade level.

**Academic Intervention Services (ELA & Math Lab)**

Beginning September 2019, we have redesigned our ELA and math Lab practices. ELA and math Lab teachers will predominantly spend their time assisting students within the confines of the students' regularly scheduled ELA and math classes in lieu of pulling students out to receive additional support.

Thus, based upon the changes made by NYSED to the annual Testing Program and the District's approach to using the data produced from these assessments, we are encouraging our families to have their students in grades 3- 8, participate in the ELA and Mathematics tests scheduled in the spring of 2019.

Respectfully,

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