



Pearl River School District

135 West Crooked Hill Road
Pearl River, New York 10965
www.pearlriver.org
Phone: 845-620-3920 Fax: 845-620-3927
pochintestam@pearlriver.org



Marco F. Pochintesta
Superintendent of Schools

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Dear Parents and Guardians:

The annual testing period in ELA and Math for students in grades 3 through 8 begins in April. School principals will send along specific information and guidance regarding testing at their respective schools in a subsequent letter. In this letter I want to share with parents the information that we have from the New York State Education Department regarding the changes to the testing that have been made over the last two years and are continuing this year.

Attached with this letter are two documents from the New York State Education Department that explain the changes in testing: *The 2019 Grades 3-8 New York State Assessments: What Parents Need to Know*, and *Parents' Frequently Asked Questions About New York State's Annual Grades 3-8 English Language Arts & Mathematics Tests*. I encourage you to read these documents, especially if your child is new to the state testing experience.

Our District uses the results from the state assessments to add to our understanding of how our students are progressing in their learning of the content of the curriculum in ELA and Math. State testing results are an important component of the "multiple measures" that inform our understanding of how our students are doing. State test results, in combination with, classroom performance, local test results, and teacher's assessment and observations allow us to make informed decisions regarding instructional practices and priorities, as well as resources.

As always, I appreciate the thoughtful consideration you give to all aspects of your children's education and your support of the schools.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Marco F. Pochintesta'.

THE STATE ASSESSMENTS

What Parents Need to Know



Agenda

- **Annual Grades 3-8 English Language Arts & Mathematics Tests**
 - Test Content
 - Test Results
 - Redesigned Score Reports for Parents
 - Test Facts
- **Adjustments to the Tests**
 - Fewer Test Sessions
 - Untimed
 - Greater Teacher Involvement
- **What's Next?**
- **Q+A**

Test Content

The annual Grades 3-8 English Language Arts and Mathematics Tests:

- Focus on the New York State learning standards, which guide classroom instruction in ELA and math;
- Measure important real-world skills such as problem solving, critical thinking, and writing; and
- Require students to explain their answers and describe and defend their reasoning.

Test Results

Your child's test results...

- ❑ serve as an 'academic checkup' to make sure your child is on track for the next grade level;
- ❑ measure progress over time so you can see your child's year-to-year performance; and
- ❑ provide a deeper level of information by pinpointing what skills your child has mastered and what skills your child is still developing.

This information is included in the redesigned **Score Reports** for parents. The updated reports are **easier to understand** and provide **more information about what students should know** and be able to do at each grade level.

Test Facts

- ❑ The federal Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 requires that students in grades 3-8 are tested once a year in ELA and math.
- ❑ State law and regulations of the Commissioner of Education prohibit school districts from making promotion or placement decisions based solely or primarily on student performance on the tests.
- ❑ Scores are not used to evaluate teachers.

Test Changes

- ❑ Over the past few years, the State Education Department has made several changes to the annual Grades 3-8 ELA and Math Tests in response to concerns from parents and educators.
- ❑ Last year, the Grades 3-8 ELA and Math Tests were reduced from three test sessions per subject to only two sessions per subject this year. That change remains in effect this year, meaning each subject will have two days of testing instead of three.
- ❑ The 2019 tests will continue to be untimed so students who need additional time to work can have it, within the confines of the regular school day.

Test Changes – Fewer Testing Sessions

- ❑ The 2019 Grades 3–8 ELA and Math Tests will again be two test sessions per subject to rather than three sessions as in 2013-2017.
- ❑ This means each subject will have two days of testing instead of three.
- ❑ With fewer test sessions, each test will have substantially fewer questions than in recent years, lessening test fatigue for students and better enabling them to demonstrate what they know and are able to do.

Test Changes – No Time Limits

- ❑ The **2019 tests will again be untimed**, as they have been for the past several years.
- ❑ Students who are still working on their exams will be allowed to continue to work, within the confines of the regular school day.
- ❑ Schools and districts have discretion to allow students to read silently or quietly exit the room when they have completed their test while others continue to work.

Test Changes – Greater Teacher Involvement

- ❑ The 2019 Grades 3-8 ELA and Math Tests were **constructed and thoroughly reviewed by New York State educators** to ensure they measure what students are learning in their classrooms.
- ❑ Educators from across the State came to Albany several times this past summer and fall to review and select all passages and questions on the 2019 tests.
- ❑ This year, most of the test questions on the assessments will have been written by New York State teachers specifically for the annual New York State tests.

Test Changes – Earlier Release Dates

- ❑ **Test questions and instructional reports will be released on or around June 1.**
- ❑ An earlier release date for the instructional reports gives teachers more time to use the information before the end of the school year.
- ❑ The State Education Department will release **75-percent of test questions from the 2019 exams**, as it did last year. You can view the [2018 questions](http://www.engageny.org/3-8) (www.engageny.org/3-8) at EngageNY.

What's next for the 3-8 tests? Computer-Based Testing

- ❑ Computer-based tests are tests administered on a computer, tablet, or Chromebook. In other words, **students take the test on a computer** instead of using a pencil and paper.
- ❑ Computer-based testing (CBT) has the **potential to make the assessments stronger instructional tools and will make it possible to get test results back sooner.**
- ❑ This spring, some districts chose to participate in CBT for the Grades 3-8 ELA and Math Tests. The computer tests and the paper tests are the same tests.
- ❑ The State is helping **districts transition to CBT** and plans to have additional districts utilize CBT for the annual assessments next year.

What's next?

- ❑ In September 2017, the Board of Regents voted to adopt the Next Generation Learning Standards for English Language Arts and Mathematics.
- ❑ The new standards will be implemented over the next few years giving teachers and students ample time to feel comfortable with the revised content.
- ❑ Professional development on the new standards is now underway and will continue.
- ❑ The annual ELA and Math Tests will not measure the new standards until the 2020-2021 school year.

Questions + Answers

Learn more about the assessments

Visit [NYSED.gov](https://www.nysed.gov) and [EngageNY.org](https://www.engageNY.org)

Talk to your child's teacher

PARENTS' FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT NEW YORK STATE'S ANNUAL GRADES 3-8 ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS & MATHEMATICS TESTS

Every spring, the Grades 3-8 English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics Tests are administered to students across New York State. These annual ELA and math tests for students in grades 3-8 are required by the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015. The tests are designed to measure how well students are mastering the learning standards that guide classroom instruction and help to ensure that students are on track to graduate from high school with the critical thinking, problem solving, and reasoning skills needed for success in college and the workplace. The tests also show how schools and districts are progressing with the learning standards and can be used to support professional development for teachers.

1. Are the 2019 tests the same as the 2018 tests?

- Yes, like the 2018 tests, the 2019 Grades 3-8 English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics Tests are two sessions each. This means that students will take each subject test over only two testing days instead of three as in past years.

2. Why did the Board of Regents reduce the number of test sessions?

- Fewer questions will lessen testing fatigue for students and better enable them to demonstrate what they know and are able to do.
- The decision to reduce the number of test sessions is also in line with recommendations from Governor Cuomo's Common Core Task Force Final Report.

3. When will the 2019 Grades 3-8 ELA and Math Tests be administered?

- The ELA Tests administered by paper and pencil will be given on two consecutive school days of the school's choosing between April 2 – April 4. The Math Tests administered by paper and pencil will be given on two consecutive school days of the school's choosing between May 1 – May 3.
- The ELA tests administered on computer will be given on two consecutive school days of the school's choosing between April 1 – April 8. The Math Tests administered on computer will be given on two consecutive school days of the school's choosing between April 30 – May 7.
- There are make-up test dates for students absent on test days.

4. What are computer-based tests?

- For the third year in a row, some districts/schools have chosen to administer the 2019 ELA and Math Tests on the computer. This is called computer-based testing (CBT).
- Students in those schools utilizing the CBT option have access to CBT practice tests and most have had prior experience participating in other computer-based tests in ELA and Math.
- The computer-based tests will have the same questions as the paper versions. However, students testing on computer will select their answers for multiple-choice questions on the computer and type their responses to open-ended questions rather than handwriting their responses to these questions in the paper test booklet.

5. Will the test continue to be untimed?

- Like the 2016 - 2018 tests, the 2019 Grades 3-8 ELA and Math Tests will be untimed. Schools and districts have the discretion to create their own approaches to ensure that all students who are productively working are given the time they need within the confines of the regular school day to take the tests.
- If the test is given in a large-group setting, administrators may permit students who finish to hand in their test materials (or submit the test if testing on computer) and leave the room. If so, students should exit quietly so they do not disturb any students still working.
- While exact testing times will vary by student, estimated testing times can be found in the [2019 Educator Guides](https://www.engageny.org/resource/test-guides-english-language-arts-and-mathematics). (<https://www.engageny.org/resource/test-guides-english-language-arts-and-mathematics>)

6. What types of questions are asked on the tests?

- The ELA and Math Tests include multiple choice and open-ended questions, which assess grade level learning standards.
- The questions require students to apply their knowledge and, in open-ended responses, explain their reasoning. Students will read texts, write responses, and solve real-world word problems, all of which are foundational skills necessary for success in their next grade.
- The Department will continue to release 75% of test questions. You can view the [2018 released questions](https://www.engageny.org/3-8) at EngageNY. (<https://www.engageny.org/3-8>)

7. How are New York State teachers involved in the test development process?

- Hundreds of New York State educators were involved in creating and reviewing questions for the 2019 Grades 3-8 ELA and Math Tests and selecting the questions for the test forms.
- This year, most of the test questions were written by New York State teachers specifically for the annual New York State tests.

8. Are there testing accommodations for students with disabilities?

- Yes, testing accommodations are changes made in the administration of the test that provide an opportunity for students with disabilities to demonstrate mastery of skills and attainment of knowledge without being limited or unfairly restricted due to the effects of a disability. Specific testing accommodations are recommended for individual students by the school's Committee on Special Education (CSE) or Section 504 Committee based on the student's unique needs.
- Testing accommodations must be documented on students' Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) or Section 504 plans and could include: flexibility in scheduling (e.g., scheduled breaks); flexibility in the test setting (e.g., separate location); changes in test presentation (e.g., enlarged print); and changes in the method of response (e.g., use of a scribe for written responses).
- Principals are responsible for ensuring that accommodations for students with disabilities are implemented on all State and local tests consistent with the recommendations in the IEP/Section 504 plan and in accordance with Department policy.

9. Do English Language Learners/Multilingual Learners (ELLs/MLLs) who are new to the United States take the Grades 3-8 ELA Tests?

- For the Grades 3-8 ELA Tests, schools are allowed to exempt ELLs/MLLs (including those from Puerto Rico) who, on April 1, 2019, will have been attending school in the U.S. for the first time for less than one year.
- All other ELLs/MLLs are expected to participate in the 2019 Grades 3–8 ELA Tests.

10. Are there testing accommodations for English Language Learners/Multilingual Learners?

- Yes. The school principal may authorize certain testing accommodations to English Language Learners/Multilingual Learners in accordance with their best judgment about the needs of these students. Principals should consult with each student's classroom teacher in making these determinations.
- Testing accommodations could include for both the ELA and Math Tests, separate location; and bilingual dictionaries and glossaries; and for the Math Tests only, translated editions in Chinese (traditional), Haitian Creole, Korean, Russian, and Spanish; oral translation (for lower-incidence languages); and writing responses in native language.

11. What will I learn from my child's score report?

- The results of the annual assessments will provide information about your child's academic progress and achievement. You can use your child's score report 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.
- The report will show you how your child did in comparison to other students across the State and how your child scored in specific skill 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.
- State test results may differ from the information on your child's school report card. Report card grades are cumulative and based on many factors, including class participation, homework, attendance, quizzes, tests, and other instructional activities, all of which are important in determining a child's academic achievement.

12. When will the 2019 Grades 3-8 ELA and Math Test results be available?

- As in prior years, we anticipate the test results will be available in August.

13. How will the 2019 Grades 3-8 ELA and Math Test results be used?

- The results can be used to see how schools, districts, and the State overall are progressing with the State learning standards. The 2018 scores for your school/district are available on the [Department's public data site](https://data.nysed.gov/). (<https://data.nysed.gov/>)
- However, State law and Regulations of the Education Commissioner prohibit districts from making promotion or placement decisions for students based solely or primarily on their performance on the Grades 3-8 ELA and Math Tests.
- Additionally, results from the 2019 Grades 3-8 ELA and Math Tests cannot be used to evaluate teachers.