

## **Information about the NYS ELA and Math tests – Spring 2017**

### **What do the NYS tests look like?**

#### **1) As of last year, there are a decreased number of test questions.**

One of the most consistent recommendations made to NYSED by educators and families was to reduce the length of the tests. In particular, NYSED has heard that students would be better able to demonstrate close reading and thoughtfully respond to questions if the ELA tests included fewer questions.

Based on this feedback NYSED decreased the number of test questions on both the Grade 3-8 ELA and Mathematics Tests. On the ELA, this allows students to read the passages more closely and to apply their knowledge and skill in answering the questions about them. It is also expected to decrease testing fatigue for some students. On the Grade 3-8 Mathematics Tests, students also have fewer questions to answer.

#### **2) The tests are untimed.**

As of Spring 2016, NYSED made the 3-8 ELA and Mathematics Tests untimed tests. This change provides students a better opportunity to demonstrate what they know and can do by allowing them to work at their own pace. In general, this means that as long as students are productively working they will be allowed as much time as they need to complete the ELA and Mathematics tests. Additionally, this policy helps alleviate the pressures that some students experience as a result of taking a timed assessment.

#### **3) Starting in Spring 2016, a new company makes the tests.**

The NYS 3-8 ELA and Math tests are made by Questar, Inc., a Minnesota based company that works with a number of states.

### **NYSED websites**

#### **Website with information about the NYS tests:**

<http://www.p12.nysed.gov/assessment/>

**NYS website with questions from previous tests \*\* Please note that this is for your reference only. Many of our teachers use these questions to prepare students for the NYS tests, so we appreciate it if you DO NOT USE THEM FOR PRACTICE. \*\***

<https://www.engageny.org/resource/released-2016-3-8-ela-and-mathematics-state-test-questions>

## **What are the consequences of taking/not taking the NYS tests?\*\*\***

- 4<sup>th</sup> grade tests: Most District 2 middle schools use the tests as part of the admissions process. This is a district with many competitive families. If your child does not have a 4<sup>th</sup> grade test score it will impact her/his admission considerations at many/most middle schools.
- 3<sup>rd</sup> grade tests: If your child does not take the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade test and does take the 4<sup>th</sup> grade test, s/he will be compared with other students, most of whom have had the opportunity to experience this type of test before, while s/he won't have had this experience.
- 5<sup>th</sup> grade tests: These are sometimes used by middle schools with SP programs as the basis for moving a child from the Academic Program to the SP program. The scores are used for the basis of admission to Hunter College H.S. (which starts in 7<sup>th</sup> grade) as well.

### **Types of questions**

#### ***Multiple choice***

On the ELA test, there are a series of unrelated short passages in a range of genres, with a series of multiple choice questions following each one. A student must have the focus and stamina to read, comprehend and analyze each of these passages and to select the answer that the test makers determine is the best one. Unlike in the old days, there are no “nonsense choices” among the answers.

On the math test, there are a series of questions/problems. Some are mostly visual and numerical, while others are quite wordy.

#### ***Constructed response – short and long***

On the ELA test, there are reading passages followed by questions that may be answered in a couple of sentences using **evidence from the text** as the basis for the answer. There are also questions that require longer answers that include an introduction, evidence and a conclusion.

On the math test there are word problems that require students to show their work and write an answer or answers. Many of the word problems are multi-step. For example: Isaac read 32 pages on Monday and 45 pages on Tuesday. His book is 102 pages long. How many pages must he read if he wants to finish the book on Wednesday?

There are questions that consist of a single problem and those that involve multiple portions or questions about a situation.

There are no questions that appear as simple mathematical sentences, equations, or calculations. All the questions are in the context of a real-world type problem. For example: Lisa and Regina are buying a carpet for their office. They want the carpet to cover the entire floor. The dimensions of their office are 12' long by 6' wide. How big a carpet do they need to buy?

## **Why are there standardized tests?**

Historically, in significant portions of our country, many students receive substandard educations. This takes place for various reasons, but a common myth is that certain “types” of students simply can’t learn or can’t handle cognitively challenging work. Instead of schools acknowledging and addressing variations in student experience and home environments, the effects of these factors may be viewed as simply confirming the beliefs. The intent of educational standards was to shift this view to one of problem-solving: How to ensure that all students were given the opportunity and support to acquire the information and skills that would permit them to be successful within the current society.

In order to ascertain that schools were actually taking this goal seriously, standardized tests were put in place. The intent of the standardized tests is both to assess schools’ success in meeting this goal and to provide them with feedback about the strengths and weaknesses of their teaching. For a host of real and political reasons, including poorly constructed tests and misuse of their results, the original intent has been forgotten. In the past two years, NYS has been attempting to respond to these concerns, and restore to the standardized tests more of their originally-intended value. It promises to be a process, but one worth engaging in.