



THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT / THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK

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Commissioner of Education  
President of the University of the State of New York  
89 Washington Avenue, Room 111  
Albany, New York 12234

E-mail: [commissioner@mail.nysed.gov](mailto:commissioner@mail.nysed.gov)  
Twitter: @JohnKingNYSED  
Tel: (518) 474-5844  
Fax: (518) 473-4909

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Dear Colleagues:

Educators across New York State now have more critical assessment information that can be used to improve instruction and student learning through collaborative conversations, individual learning, and professional development.

In response to educator requests for data, information, and other resources, we have worked hard to release item-level data for all test questions and test questions with detailed annotations.

Last week, secure [instructional reports](#) were released early so that your district might have valuable feedback on student learning. Many districts and schools have been able to put these reports to immediate use in educator planning sessions. Educators across New York State have been able to closely analyze these data, paying particular attention to which standards students have been able to meet and which need more emphasis. Along with other information about student learning gathered throughout the last school year, these instructional data reports are helping teachers, principals, and district leaders reflect on instructional priorities and strategies for the year ahead.

This week, we released [50% of the 2014 Grades 3-8 English Language Arts \(ELA\) and math test questions](#) (an increase from 25 percent for the 2013 tests). Now, in addition to understanding the percentage of students who answered questions correctly and which standards the questions measured, you are able to analyze test questions, including the percentage of students that selected each plausible but incorrect response for released items. The released items will also provide increased insight into how the questions measure the intended standard. You can use this information, in collaboration with your colleagues, to identify student skills and understanding and to plan for the future.

As you know, frustrations around testing and test prep, along with questions and concerns about educator accountability, generated considerable public dialogue last year, some of it productive and some of it counter-productive. It falls to teachers and leaders like you to help separate fact from fiction, to ensure that all voices are heard and, most important, to help the families and children we serve understand why our efforts are necessary to improve our schools and raise student achievement.

Importantly, we must remember that assessments are only one measure of our progress. They help all of the adults in a child's life know the extent to which he/she is headed for success in college or in a career and, if there are reasons for concern, assessments can provide a critical flag for intervention. Moreover, while state law specifies that test scores must be *one* factor in a teacher's evaluation, they are *never* the only one. Please work to inform the choices made in your community so that assessments

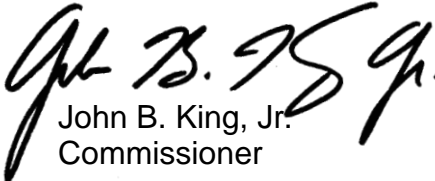
are *always* functioning as tools to inform our improvement rather than as one-dimensional indicators of teacher quality.

Additionally, no one equates testing with teaching, and test prep should consume as little classroom time as possible. We should test only as much as is needed to inform instruction and hold ourselves accountable, and we should do everything possible to minimize unintended consequences from testing – from narrowing of the curriculum to student and parent anxiety.

Finally, it's important to keep in mind that New York State, like most states, is in a period of transition that began with the adoption of higher learning standards in 2010. We have invested tens of millions of dollars to support educators in their work. We will invest millions more in the years ahead. This is hard work and the positive results we are seeing are directly attributable to the dedication and determination of classroom teachers and leaders like you. The Board of Regents and I are deeply grateful for your hard work and partnership.

Let's have a great school year ahead. Let's continue a productive and informative dialogue on how to improve. And let's help parents and students understand that assessments are a necessary part of public education but by no means the whole story. Ultimately, success in school is reflected in many ways – from attendance and graduation rates to parent and student feedback to the student progress you track daily. Let's all continue to work toward the goal of classrooms that are at once rigorous and engaging, challenging and nurturing, and filled with both the well-earned satisfaction of achievement through hard work and the joy of learning.

Sincerely,



John B. King, Jr.  
Commissioner