



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

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August 10, 2015

Dear Colleagues:

This week, we released 50 percent of the 2015 Grades 3-8 ELA test questions and associated reading passages and math test questions. Each released multiple-choice question includes the question itself, the answer key, the standard(s) measured by the question, and the statewide percentage of students who answered the question correctly. Each released constructed-response question includes the question itself, the standard(s) measured by the question, an example of a full-credit response to the question, and the statewide mean raw score for the question. You can use this information, in collaboration with your colleagues, to identify student skills and understanding. Please visit our EngageNY website to view the questions and other pertinent information.<sup>1</sup>

In response to educator requests for data, information, and other resources, we have worked to release as much information as possible without hindering or impairing the validity or reliability of future examinations. And now New York educators have more critical assessment information to improve instruction and student learning through collaborative conversations, individual learning, and professional development. Secure instructional reports were released early this summer to provide schools with valuable information on student learning. Many districts and schools have been able to put these reports to immediate use in educator planning sessions, paying particular attention to which standards students have been able to meet and which need more emphasis. This, along with other information about student learning gathered throughout the last school year, is helping teachers, principals, and district leaders set instructional priorities and strategies for the year ahead.

The state assessments cannot be developed without the content expertise and experience of New York State's educators. The recently announced contract to create future Grades 3-8 ELA and math assessments calls for even more NYS teacher involvement in the development of the tests. It falls to teachers and leaders like you to help families and students understand why assessments are necessary to improve schools and raise student achievement.

State law specifies that test scores must be one factor in teachers' evaluations, but they are never the only factor. Local decisions made in your school district should reinforce that assessments always function as tools for improvement rather than as one-dimensional indicators of teacher quality.

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<sup>1</sup> Please see: <https://www.engageny.org/3-8>

Test preparation should consume as little classroom time as possible. We should test only as much as is needed to guide instruction. Let's work together to do all we can to eliminate or minimize unintended consequences from testing, whether increased anxiety for students and their parents, or the narrowing of the curriculum.

Many states, including New York, are undergoing a transition to higher learning standards that began in 2010. Although there remains much work to be done, we are seeing positive results. I attribute that to the dedication and determination of classroom teachers and leaders like you. The Board of Regents and I are grateful for your hard work.

Best wishes for a safe, successful school year.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "MaryEllen Elia".

MaryEllen Elia  
Commissioner