



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

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June 2016

Dear Colleagues:

As a lifelong educator, I know the value of receiving timely information about how students performed on annual assessments. In my experience, you can never have this data soon enough. This year, you and your schools will have access to this information earlier than in past years.

- 75 percent of the questions from the 2016 Grades 3-8 English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics Tests that counted toward student scores are now posted online at EngageNY.org.
- 100 percent of the constructed-response questions have also been released, and teachers and parents will for the first time have the opportunity to review their students' constructed-response answers.
- Instructional reports will be available to schools and districts by the end of the week.

Taken together, the test questions, instructional reports, and student responses can help educators to make informed decisions about professional development and curriculum and plan for the upcoming school year. And, because test data and questions were released earlier, districts and schools will now have several weeks before the end of the school year to use the information.

Released 2016 Grade 3-8 Test Questions

On May 31, 2016, SED released 75 percent of the 2016 Grades 3-8 ELA and math test questions that counted toward students' scores. Each released multiple-choice question includes the question itself and an item map that provides the answer key and the standard(s) measured by the question. Each released constructed-response (open ended) question includes the question itself and an item map that provides the standard(s) measured by the question.

Also included in the release are 100 percent of the constructed-response questions from the Grade 3-8 ELA and Mathematics Tests as well as the scoring materials used by educators to score student responses to these questions. Educators can use this information, in collaboration with colleagues, to examine student skills and identify where

student learning is strong and where there are gaps. The questions and other materials are available at [EngageNY.org \(https://www.engageny.org/3-8\)](https://www.engageny.org/3-8).

Opportunity for Educators and Parents to Review Student Responses

For the first time, educators and parents will have the opportunity to review student responses to the constructed-response questions from the 2016 tests, giving them additional information about student learning. The State Education Department is providing guidance for districts on how to implement this review so student privacy is protected and the integrity of the students' responses is preserved. However, districts will use local discretion to develop their own procedures for reviewing the data. The guidance is outlined below.

Parents/guardians are permitted to review their students' responses to constructed-response questions in the 2016 ELA Test Book 2 and Book 3 and Mathematics Test Book 3. For the ELA tests, parents/guardians may also be allowed to read the passages associated with the constructed-response questions. To ensure test integrity, the review must take place in the presence of school personnel. Schools are able—but not required—to provide copies of the student's constructed-response test books to the child's parents upon request.

Similarly, teachers and other educators are permitted to review the responses to constructed-response questions in the 2016 ELA Book 2 and Book 3 and Mathematics Book 3 written by his or her students. All other books are to remain secure.

All reviews of student test papers must take place in a secure location and in accordance with district-established procedures. Original test books should never be left unattended. If, in accordance with local procedures, teachers are provided with copies of their students' constructed-response test books, they must be advised of and carefully follow locally-developed procedures for the handling and storing of such copies in accordance with the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Additionally, schools must securely retain all original student test papers for at least one year after the end of the school year.

Instructional Reports for 2016 Grade 3-8 ELA and Mathematics Tests

This year, the State Education Department authorized the release of instructional reports for the 2016 Grades 3-8 ELA and math on June 3, 2016. This is the earliest that these reports have ever been released, and the first time they have been released during the same school year in which the tests were administered, allowing schools and districts more time to use this information for summer curriculum writing and professional development activities.

- Reports are available through Regional Information Centers (RIC) and/or Level 1 data centers.¹

¹ For a summary of the instructional reports made available by the RICs, see <http://www.boces.org/Portals/0/Web%20Docs/RIC%20Reports/NYSRICsCognos.pdf>. The New York City Department of Education and the Yonkers City school district serve as their own Level 1 data center and will have different reporting solutions and time lines. For a

- As in past years, the 2016 instructional reports for ELA and math are based on raw scores only, which are not comparable from year to year.² Scale scores and performance levels will not be available until the statewide results are released later this summer.
- The reports show educators how each student performed on every question that contributed to his/her score: authorized personnel can see whether the student answered the question correctly and the New York State P-12 ELA or Mathematics Learning Standard(s) measured by the question.
- The reports also allow for raw score comparisons at the item, cluster, and standard levels for students, classrooms, schools, districts, and regions of the State.

The instructional reports, coupled with the released test questions, provide schools with robust information on student learning. Along with other information about student performance gathered throughout the last school year, these data from the Grades 3-8 assessments can help teachers, principals, and district leaders set instructional priorities and develop strategies for the year ahead.

Moving Forward

In the coming years, our goal is to release more information to you and get it into your hands earlier. I have heard this request from many of you. However, it is important to remember that we cannot release everything right away. It takes time to score the exams and process the data. And, to maintain exam validity and reliability, we have to be purposeful about the items that are made public.

As you know, the 2016 tests were different than those from recent years. We shortened this year's tests by removing test questions and made them less stressful by allowing students more time to finish if they needed it. Educators also played a bigger role in reviewing test items. Thanks to their help and expertise, I believe that the tests were a better measure of what is being taught in our classrooms.

Next year, more educators will be involved in the review of test questions and the creation of the final test forms that students see. Then, beginning with the 2018 Grade 3-8 ELA and Mathematics Exams, all test questions will be written and reviewed by New York State educators. New York has a long history of having teachers write test questions for statewide exams. I am pleased that we are once again moving in this direction and hope you will continue to remind your school communities about the work we have done and will be doing to improve our testing program.

summary of last year's release of instructional reports, see

<http://www.p12.nysed.gov/assessment/ei/2014/earlyreleaseinstructionalreports.pdf>.

² Because each year's test includes different questions, the questions may, on average, be slightly easier or slightly more difficult than were the questions on the prior year's test. To ensure that test scores are comparable given these slight year-to-year differences, a standard statistical process called equating is employed. Equating adjusts slightly the number of raw score points (i.e., questions answered correctly) needed to achieve a certain scale score and performance standard, relative to the small difference in difficulty of the current year's test. For example, if the current year's test is slightly easier than was the prior year's test, the number of raw score points necessary to achieve a given performance standard will increase slightly. If the current year's test is slightly harder than was the prior year's test, the number of raw score points necessary to achieve a given performance standard will decrease slightly.

Best wishes for a smooth and productive finish to the school year. And, thank you, as always, for your hard work and dedication on behalf of our students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "MaryEllen Elia". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'M' and a long, sweeping tail on the 'a'.

MaryEllen Elia
Commissioner