

Fact Sheet – Common Core, Assessments and Adjustments

What is the Common Core? The Common Core State Standards adopted by the Board of Regents in 2010 identify what students in Kindergarten through 12th grade should know and be able to do in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics to be prepared for college and career success. The standards emphasize critical thinking, careful reading of fiction and non-fiction, writing with evidence, effective communication of ideas, and real world problem solving in mathematics. The Common Core is a set of standards; it is not a prescribed curriculum.

Who developed the Common Core? K-12 teachers, higher education faculty and content experts from across the nation came together to write the Common Core State Standards, with nearly 10,000 comments and suggestions, including many from New York teachers and parents. The Common Core Standards have been adopted by forty-five states and are supported by the New York State Educational Conference Board (the Conference of Big Five City School Districts, New York State Association of School Business Officials, New York State PTA, New York State Council of School Superintendents, New York State School Boards Association, New York State United Teachers, and School Administrators Association of New York State).

Do the Common Core standards require teaching scripted lessons from the State Education Department? No. Curriculum is – and always has been – a local responsibility and decision. The New York State Education Department (NYSED) developed optional lesson plans as tools that teachers may use in the classroom, but these lessons are not intended to be used as a “script” for delivering instruction. Teachers still have flexibility to adapt their lessons to best meet their students’ needs.

What is the timeline for implementation of the Common Core in New York? The Common Core standards are being phased in over seven years in New York State. They were adopted by the New York State Board of Regents in 2010. The new ELA and math Common Core assessments for grades 3-8 began in 2013. In 2014, the first Common Core Regents exams will be administered in Mathematics (Algebra I) and ELA. The requirement that students pass Common Core Regents exams will first apply to the students who are scheduled to graduate in 2017.

Is the Common Core appropriate for all students? Yes. The Common Core standards give all students the opportunity to receive an excellent education that will prepare them for college and career success. All too often, students in low performing schools, students with disabilities, and students who are English Language Learners are held to lower expectations and, as a result, do not receive the targeted instruction or support they need. Teachers know their students best and can adapt the Common Core materials in order to provide the instructional support necessary to meet the diverse learning needs of each student they teach.

Does the Common Core require more State tests? No, the tests required by NYSED are the same as before the adoption of the Common Core. Every test administered by New York State (3-8 English Language Arts and Math, Science in Grades 4 and 8, and Regents exams in English Language Arts, Math, Science, U.S. History, and Global), with the exception of the US History & Government and Global History & Geography Regents, is required by federal law. All other tests are locally determined.

Why are there more local tests now? Pressures at the state and local level may have resulted in more local testing than needed and in rote test preparation that crowds out quality instruction. As part of the Board of Regents initiative to keep the focus on teaching in New York schools, NYSED will seek to offer grants to local school districts that commit to review all local assessment practices and eliminate local tests that do not inform instruction and improve student learning.

Is a teacher's job performance based solely on the Common Core state test scores? No. Growth on state tests is only used for approximately 20% of all teachers' ratings statewide. For those teachers, student growth on state tests accounts for 1/5 of the total evaluation score; the other 4/5 is established locally through collective bargaining and is comprised of measures such as multiple classroom observations, feedback from students and/or parents, student portfolios and/or other teacher artifacts. For all other teachers, approximately 80% across the state, all evaluation factors are locally determined.

Why doesn't SED release the state test after the test is given? If all test questions were released, there would not be enough items for use in future tests without a significant increase in field testing and money dedicated to test development. NYSED is seeking to reduce testing time and field tests. For the state tests administered in April 2013, approximately 25 percent of the items were released with detailed rationales and samples of student work. All educators in New York also have access to performance data for their students to identify each student's strengths and weaknesses.

Adjustments Underway

Starting in spring 2013, NYSED reduced state testing time for grades 3 and 4 assessments. For the spring 2014 tests, NYSED is reducing the number of questions on the state ELA tests in grades 5-8 and on all 3-8 grade state math tests.

The Board of Regents has a long-standing policy against administering standardized tests to our very youngest students. There are no pre-K-grade 2 standardized tests required by the State. NYSED strongly recommends against the use of bubble tests or other traditional standardized tests for children in these grades.

NYSED is asking the federal government for flexibility to:

- Eliminate double-testing of students in grades 7 and 8 who take a Regents Exam in mathematics.
- Allow school districts to administer the state test at the student's instructional level rather than his or her chronological age, where appropriate, for specific students with disabilities.
- Allow English Language Learners who have attended school in the U.S. for less than three to five consecutive years, depending on a student's needs, to be tested in Native Language Arts in lieu of the ELA assessment (beginning with Spanish speakers).

The Board of Regents has requested new state resources to reduce field testing to a minimum.

As part of the Board of Regents initiative to keep the focus on teaching in New York State schools, SED will offer "Teaching is the Core" grants to local school districts that commit to review all local assessment practices to ensure that all local tests help inform instruction and improve student learning.

The Board of Regents and SED are committed to using the feedback received at the community forums to make thoughtful adjustments to ensure the success of the state's commitment to graduating every student college and career ready.