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Office of Standards, Assessment and Reporting

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TO: District Superintendents
Superintendents of Public and Nonpublic Schools
Principals of Public, Nonpublic, and Charter Schools

FROM: David Abrams *David Abrams*

SUBJECT: 2011 Grades 3–8 English Language Arts and Mathematics Test Specifications

This memorandum supersedes my memorandum dated June 2010. It provides updated information regarding the specifications of the Grades 3–8 English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics Tests that will be administered beginning in spring 2011.

At their June 22, 2009 meeting, the Board of Regents directed the New York State Education Department to redesign the Grades 3–8 English Language Arts and Mathematics Tests to cover a broader range of performance indicators. In order to accomplish this, the Department has made changes to the format of the testing program, lengthened the amount of time each test will take, and changed the administration dates to later in the academic year.

To assist in the planning for the upcoming school year, this memorandum provides information on the revised specifications for the Grades 3–8 tests. This information includes the approximate number and types of questions by grade and section, the approximate percentage of questions assessing each standard, and the format of each test. Schools and districts are encouraged to use this information when reviewing local curricula and in planning their instructional programs.

Please note that the performance indicators to be assessed have not changed. These are still based upon the New York State Learning Standards which are available on the Department's web site at: <http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/ciai/cores.html>. However, the number of performance indicators to be assessed on each test will be expanded beyond those in prior years. Also, please be advised that as a result of the redesign the configuration of books to be administered for each subject and grade is currently under discussion with our vendor, CTB/McGraw-Hill. This information will be provided, once final determinations are made.

We appreciate the efforts of all teachers and school officials and look forward to further collaboration during the 2010–11 school year. Please direct any questions concerning this memorandum to the Office of State Assessment at: emscassessinfo@mail.nysed.gov.

Thank you for your continued cooperation in assisting the Department with the administration of the New York State Testing Program.

Test Specifications

2011 Grades 3–8 English Language Arts and Mathematics Tests

English Language Arts

Revised test specifications have been developed for the 2011 Grades 3–8 English Language Arts Tests. Like the 2010 tests, the 2011 tests will be aligned with the three learning standards within the reading, writing, and listening modalities. Each grade level test will feature multiple-choice, short-response, and extended-response questions.

English Language Arts Test Design

The following charts provide a description of the test design for each grade.

Grade 3

Section	Subject	Number of Multiple-Choice Questions	Number of Short-Response Questions	Number of Extended-Response Questions	Total Number of Questions	Approximate Testing Time
1	Reading	35	0	0	35	60 minutes
2	Listening/Writing Mechanics	8	3	0	11	30 minutes
3	Reading/Writing	0	4	1	5	60 minutes
Total		43	7	1	51	150 minutes

Grade 4

Section	Subject	Number of Multiple-Choice Questions	Number of Short-Response Questions	Number of Extended-Response Questions	Total Number of Questions	Approximate Testing Time
1	Reading	43	0	0	43	70 minutes
2	Listening/Writing Mechanics	8	3	0	11	30 minutes
3	Reading/Writing	0	4	1	5	60 minutes
Total		51	7	1	59	160 minutes

Grade 5

Section	Subject	Number of Multiple-Choice Questions	Number of Short-Response Questions	Number of Extended-Response Questions	Total Number of Questions	Approximate Testing Time
1	Reading	35	0	0	35	60 minutes
2	Listening/Writing Mechanics	8	3	0	11	30 minutes
3	Reading/Writing	0	4	1	5	60 minutes
Total		43	7	1	51	150 minutes

Grade 6

Section	Subject	Number of Multiple-Choice Questions	Number of Short-Response Questions	Number of Extended-Response Questions	Total Number of Questions	Approximate Testing Time
1	Reading	41	0	0	41	70 minutes
2	Listening/Writing Mechanics	8	3	0	11	30 minutes
3	Reading/Writing	0	4	1	5	60 minutes
Total		49	7	1	57	160 minutes

Grade 7

Section	Subject	Number of Multiple-Choice Questions	Number of Short-Response Questions	Number of Extended-Response Questions	Total Number of Questions	Approximate Testing Time
1	Reading	41	0	0	41	70 minutes
2	Listening/Writing Mechanics	8	3	0	11	30 minutes
3	Reading/Writing	0	4	1	5	60 minutes
Total		49	7	1	57	160 minutes

Grade 8

Section	Subject	Number of Multiple-Choice Questions	Number of Short-Response Questions	Number of Extended-Response Questions	Total Number of Questions	Approximate Testing Time
1	Reading	41	0	0	41	70 minutes
2	Listening/Writing Mechanics	8	3	0	11	30 minutes
3	Reading/Writing	0	4	1	5	60 minutes
Total		49	7	1	57	160 minutes

Approximate Percentage of Questions Assessing Each Standard

The following chart shows, for each grade, the approximate percentage of questions that will assess each of the three English Language Arts Learning Standards.

Standard	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8
1. Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking for Information and Understanding	33%	36%	43%	36%	39%	39%
2. Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking for Literary Response and Expression	47%	44.5%	36%	44.5%	39%	39%
3. Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking for Critical Analysis and Evaluation	20%	19.5%	21%	19.5%	22%	22%

Question Formats for the English Language Arts Tests

The Grades 3–8 English Language Arts Tests will contain questions with a variety of formats, including multiple-choice, short-response, extended-response, and graphic organizers.

For multiple-choice questions, students will select the correct response from four answer choices.

For short- and extended-response questions, students will write an answer to an open-ended question. The extended responses are scored for writing as well as for reading comprehension.

The editing paragraph and two extended responses will no longer be used to assess writing mechanics. Instead, multiple-choice questions will be included to assess the students' knowledge of grammar, punctuation, and word usage.

Reading

In the reading section of the English Language Arts Tests, students will read several passages representing a variety of genres. For each passage, students will apply the skills and knowledge gained in the classroom to answer reading comprehension questions that demonstrate their understanding of the passages. Each passage will give the student all of the information that is needed to successfully answer the associated questions without using their background knowledge of the subject.

The reading passages that appear on the tests will be similar to the kinds of materials students read both in the classroom and for homework assignments. Reading passages will be carefully selected for grade-level appropriate vocabulary and content.

Tests at every grade level will contain both literary and informational reading passages. Literary passages may include short stories, folktales, poetry, or other forms of literary writing; informational passages may include articles, excerpts from biographies or autobiographies, essays, or other forms of informational writing.

Genres for the tests will include:

- Folktales
- Reports
- Letters
- Stories
- Informative pieces
- Poems
- Literary pieces
- Interviews
- How-to pieces
- Classical works
- Plays

A minimum of four genres will be used on each test for interest and literary diversity.

Higher-order thinking skills will be required on some of the questions that accompany the reading passages. These skills include: summarizing, analyzing, inferring, interpreting, predicting, and evaluating information.

Listening

In the listening section of the English Language Arts Tests, students will listen to a passage and apply the skills and knowledge that they gained in the classroom to answer comprehension questions. The questions will assess student understanding of the passages, listening skills, and retention of details.

Listening selections will represent a variety of genres. The listening passages that appear on the tests will be similar to the kinds of materials students read and hear in the classroom. Listening passages will be carefully selected for grade-level appropriate vocabulary and content. Students will not read the questions prior to hearing the listening selection so that they focus on the passage being read rather than on finding answers to the questions. Depending upon grade level, students will be encouraged to take careful notes during the second or both readings of the listening selection to assist them in answering the questions that follow.

Writing

The reading/writing section of the tests will be composed of four short-response questions and one extended-response question. Students will be required to demonstrate knowledge of three types of writing: narrative, persuasive, and informative. Students will write from a variety of prompts and for many different audiences. Student responses will be evaluated on how well the writing addresses the task and demonstrates understanding of the passages.

Mathematics

The Grades 3–8 Mathematics Tests will assess the five content strands and five process strands in the New York State 3–8 Mathematics Core Curriculum. Questions will be developed in accordance with increasing problem solving and higher cognitive demands that are associated with the increasing cognitive maturity of the student.

Mathematics Test Design

The following charts provide a description of the test design for each grade.

Grade 3

Section	Number of Multiple-Choice Questions	Number of Short-Response (2 credit) Questions	Number of Extended-Response (3 credit) Questions	Total Number of Questions	Approximate Testing Time
1	40	0	0	40	60 minutes
2	0	4	2	6	40 minutes
Total	40	4	2	46	100 minutes

Grade 4

Section	Number of Multiple-Choice Questions	Number of Short-Response (2 credit) Questions	Number of Extended-Response (3 credit) Questions	Total Number of Questions	Approximate Testing Time
1	45	0	0	45	70 minutes
2	0	8	4	12	70 minutes
Total	45	8	4	57	140 minutes

Grade 5

Section	Number of Multiple-Choice Questions	Number of Short-Response (2 credit) Questions	Number of Extended-Response (3 credit) Questions	Total Number of Questions	Approximate Testing Time
1	41	0	0	41	60 minutes
2	0	4	4	8	50 minutes
Total	41	4	4	49	110 minutes

Grade 6

Section	Number of Multiple-Choice Questions	Number of Short-Response (2 credit) Questions	Number of Extended-Response (3 credit) Questions	Total Number of Questions	Approximate Testing Time
1	40	0	0	40	60 minutes
2	0	6	4	10	60 minutes
Total	40	6	4	50	120 minutes

Grade 7

Section	Number of Multiple-Choice Questions	Number of Short-Response (2 credit) Questions	Number of Extended-Response (3 credit) Questions	Total Number of Questions	Approximate Testing Time
1	45	0	0	45	70 minutes
2	0	4	4	8	55 minutes
Total	45	4	4	53	125 minutes

Grade 8

Section	Number of Multiple-Choice Questions	Number of Short-Response (2 credit) Questions	Number of Extended-Response (3 credit) Questions	Total Number of Questions	Approximate Testing Time
1	42	0	0	42	65 minutes
2	0	8	4	12	70 minutes
Total	42	8	4	54	135 minutes

Approximate Percentage of Questions Assessing Each Strand

The questions on the Grades 3–8 Mathematics Tests will assess both the content and the process strands of New York State Mathematics Standard 3. Each question will be aligned to a content performance indicator and is associated with one or more process strands, as appropriate for the concepts embodied in the task. As a result of the alignment to both process and content strands, the tests will assess students' conceptual understanding, procedural fluency, and problem-solving abilities, rather than assessing their knowledge of isolated skills and facts.

Strand	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8
1. Number Sense and Operations	48%	45%	39%	37%	30%	11%
2. Algebra	13%	14%	11%	19%	12%	44%
3. Geometry	13%	12%	25%	17%	14%	35%
4. Measurement	13%	17%	14%	11%	14%	10%
5. Probability and Statistics	13%	12%	11%	16%	30%	0%

Question Formats for Mathematics Tests

The Mathematics Tests will contain questions in the following formats: multiple choice, short response, and extended response.

For all multiple-choice questions, students select the correct response from four answer choices.

Additional Information

This fall, the Department will provide an update posted to the *Guide to the Grades 3–8 English Language Arts and Mathematics Tests*. The updated guide will include sample questions.

We understand and appreciate the hard work of you and your staff to ensure valid testing for New York State students. For questions regarding the 2011 Grades 3–8 English Language Arts and Mathematics Tests, please submit all inquiries to emscassessinfo@mail.nysed.gov.