



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

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To: Superintendents of Public Schools
Principals of Public, Charter, Religious, and Independent Schools

From: MaryEllen Elia, Commissioner *MaryEllen Elia*

Subject: Communication with Parents Regarding Student Participation in Elementary- and Intermediate-level State Assessments

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide a summary of federal and State requirements and policies regarding student participation in New York State elementary- and intermediate-level State assessments, as well as materials provided by the Department that can be used as aides in communicating with parents.

Federal and State Laws

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires that 95% of students in each public school, including charter schools, and each school district participate yearly in assessments in English language arts and mathematics in Grades 3-8, and in science at least once during Grades 3-5 and 6-9. This 95% participation requirement applies to all subgroups, which include racial/ethnic groups, English language learners, low-income students, and students with disabilities. ESSA also requires school districts and charter schools to provide parents, upon their request, with information on any current state or local policy or procedures or parental rights regarding student participation in required assessments.

With the exception of certain areas in which parental consent is required, such as Committee on Special Education (CSE) evaluations for students with disabilities, New York State does not have any laws regarding parental preferences pertaining to student participation in State assessments. State assessments are an important part of instruction in education programs in that assessments provide an evaluation of student mastery of the State Learning Standards and student knowledge and skills and help shape future instruction. Results from the assessments also help identify achievement gaps among different student populations. When many students do not take the State assessments, educational leaders find it harder to recognize these gaps and provide support and resources to the students who need them.

Communication with Parents

School and district leaders are encouraged to communicate with parents and explain federal, State and local requirements and policies related to student participation in State assessments. It is also important to share information about how the results will be used and how participation in the State assessments helps teachers to plan their lessons and understand how well students are learning the content being taught. Assessment results also help school, district, and State education leaders determine what is and is not working well so that resources can be best used.

For the past three years, the Department has created an optional "Assessments Toolkit" to help superintendents communicate information about New York State's annual testing program to their school communities. The toolkit contains materials such as a sample letter to parents and a PowerPoint presentation about the assessments. The Toolkit is available at <http://www.nysed.gov/assessments-toolkit>. Additionally, the "What Parents Need to Know" handout (<http://www.p12.nysed.gov/assessment/ei/2018/2018-handout-for-parents-3-8-tests.pdf>) and "Frequently Asked Questions" document (<http://www.p12.nysed.gov/assessment/ei/2018/2018-faq-for-parents-3-8-tests.pdf>) have been updated for 2018.

It is important that parents are informed about local policies related to State assessments. As the assessments are untimed, schools and districts have discretion to allow students to read silently or quietly exit the room when they have completed their assessment while others continue to work.

Similarly, for students whose families have expressed a preference that their children not participate in a State assessment, the decision of what to do in those situations is best made at the local level. Schools and districts should communicate with parents what those students will be doing while their classmates are taking the assessment. Administrators should discuss what options may be available for such students with their families.

If you have additional questions regarding the State assessments, please contact the Office of State Assessment via email at emscassessinfo@nysed.gov or (518) 474-5902.