*By working together, parents, teachers, and students can raise the level of achievement in our schools.*

*For more information, contact the New York State Education Department by e-mail at: emscassessinfo@mail.nysed.gov*

*You may also write to us at:*

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*Office of State Assessment, 7th Floor EBA*
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*Albany, New York 12234*

University of the State of New York
State Education Department

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# New York State Testing Program

## The Grades 3–8 Testing Program in English Language Arts and Mathematics

## A Parent's Guide

Achieving Excellence in Education

47386

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# The New York State Testing Program

## Achieving Excellence in Education

The New York State Board of Regents has set high learning standards for all students. In classrooms across the State, teachers are providing instruction aligned to these standards. Teachers are also routinely assessing student progress toward meeting these standards.

To provide schools, teachers, and parents with an assessment of student achievement, New York State has developed the New York State Testing Program. These standardized tests will be given each year at the same time and will challenge Grades 3 through 8 students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in English language arts and mathematics.

This guide contains information that answers the questions parents frequently ask about the New York State Testing Program. It explains the standards set for English language arts and mathematics and describes the tests that will measure student achievement. This guide also has suggestions for how you can help your children meet the New York State Learning Standards and prepare to take these tests (see pages 8 and 9).

Working together, parents and teachers can help students learn more and perform well on these important tests. The information in this booklet will help you become a more informed and active participant in your child's education.

Of course, you may have questions that are not answered in this guide. If so, please contact your child's teacher or school principal with specific questions about your child's education.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## ➢ *Why is my child being tested?*

**The New York State tests are designed to measure how well students have mastered necessary skills and to monitor the effectiveness of instructional programs.**

Although testing is not the only measure of a student's knowledge and abilities, it is a vital part of our educational process. The testing helps assess both student achievement and the progress of our schools.

The purpose of the tests is to:

- measure a student's knowledge and overall achievement
- measure a student's mastery of specific skills
- provide information to schools that can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of instructional programs
- monitor the performance of schools and school districts for the purpose of accountability to the public

These tests reflect the high standards set for elementary and intermediate grades and help ensure that students are prepared for high school. The tests are not meant to be used as the basis for promoting a student to the next grade. Students must still take and pass their courses and fulfill local school requirements.



## ➢ *What is the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act?*

**NCLB is a federal law that requires all students in every public school and district to meet the State English Language Arts and Mathematics Learning Standards.**

NCLB was enacted in 2001. The goal of the act is to improve the quality of education nationally by increasing accountability for states, school districts, and schools. Under this legislation, all states that receive federal funding are required to test students in Grades 3 through 8—including students with disabilities—in English language arts and mathematics in order to measure yearly progress.

These tests must be aligned with the New York State Learning Standards. The information gathered from the results of the tests will be used to determine whether schools and districts are making adequate yearly progress in achieving State standards.

## ➢ *What kinds of responses are students asked to provide?*

**The tests require students to show basic skills in English language arts and mathematics and to apply the knowledge and skills they have learned.**

Students show their knowledge and skills in both English language arts and mathematics by answering a broad range of questions that are aligned with the New York State Learning Standards. In some cases, students select the correct response from among four choices. At other times, students are required to write out an answer.

For the English Language Arts Test, students are tested on their reading, listening, and writing abilities by reading and listening to passages and answering questions based on those passages.

For the Mathematics Test, students solve problems and demonstrate an understanding of basic concepts and procedures. They must often support their answers by showing the steps they used to solve problems and by explaining the mathematics processes and concepts involved.

## ➢ *When are the tests given and how long do they take?*

**The tests are given in January and in March.**

All New York State students in Grade 3 through Grade 8 take the English Language Arts Test in January and the Mathematics Test in March. Approximate testing periods are from one and a half to three hours over the course of two to three days, depending on the grade.

## ➢ *How do I know these tests are good measures of the New York State Learning Standards?*

**The tests your children take were developed and evaluated carefully.**

Many New York State educators and researchers conducted extensive reviews of each test question, approving only those test questions judged to be of the highest quality and in alignment with the New York State Learning Standards.

The test questions have been field-tested on students, including students with disabilities, in New York State classrooms to ensure that the directions are clear and easy to follow, the material is interesting to students, and the tests are reliable indicators of student achievement.

Although the tests are challenging for students, the real-world graphics and charts, advertisements, articles, and magazine stories engage the students and reflect the reading they do on a daily basis.

## ➢ *Who will score the tests?*

**New York State teachers are trained to score the tests.**

Teacher-scorers receive thorough training and are monitored for consistency in their scoring and understanding of the scoring guides. This training not only ensures the accuracy of student scores, but also gives New York State teachers the opportunity to become more familiar with the high standards of performance expected of the students.

## ➢ *What will be included in the score reports?*

**The English Language Arts and Mathematics score reports are returned to schools and contain information about how well your child performed on the tests.**

This information is shown in two graphs. The first graph shows your child's overall performance on the tests based on a performance-level range between 1 and 4. Each level is clearly described in the score report.

The second graph shows the Standards Performance Index (SPI) score. This score indicates your child's relative strengths and weaknesses in the subject areas tested compared to the New York State Learning Standards.

## ➢ *Are students learning what they have been taught?*

**The New York State Testing Program helps determine the progress students are making.**

Test results provide the student, teacher, and parent with an objective report of individual student strengths and weaknesses in a variety of skill areas. These test results give teachers, schools, and school districts information they can use to improve teaching and provide additional assistance to students who need it.

## ➢ *How can I find out if my child's school is meeting the New York State Learning Standards?*

**Schools and school districts receive report cards—just as students do.**

The New York State School and District "Report Cards" are annual reports that provide information on how well schools and school districts are doing in helping students meet the learning standards.

Copies of the New York State Report Card for all public schools and school districts can be found at http://www.emsc.nysed.gov.

## ➢ *Are there accommodations for testing students with limited English proficiency?*

**There are approved accommodations for limited-English-proficient (LEP) students on most New York State tests.**

The elementary- and intermediate-level State Mathematics Tests are available in Chinese, Haitian Creole, Korean, Russian, and Spanish. If a test is not available in the language your child reads, the school may provide an interpreter.

For the English Language Arts Tests, accommodations for LEP students may include allowing for extra time, separate test locations, and the use of bilingual glossaries.

## ➢ *Are there accommodations for students with disabilities?*

**Testing accommodations are provided based on individual needs.**

During testing, accommodations must be provided for students with disabilities. These accommodations are recommended by the Committee on Special Education and specified in each student's Individualized Education Program (IEP), or in his or her Section 504 Accommodation Plan (504 Plan).

Certain testing accommodations are not permitted for some sections of the tests because these accommodations would change what the test is measuring. For example, reading to a student the portions of the English Language Arts Test intended to measure a student's reading skills would not be a permissible testing accommodation.

Students with disabilities who are also LEP students will receive both the IEP accommodations and the LEP accommodations appropriate for State testing.

# Learning Begins at Home

The New York State Learning Standards require students to acquire a working knowledge of subjects and apply that knowledge to meaningful tasks at each grade level. The New York State Testing Program will ask them to demonstrate the knowledge and skills they need to solve real-life problems—knowledge and skills that you can help to improve through daily activities and conversations in the home.

When you teach your child to double a recipe, interpret a map, explain a newspaper article, or predict the outcome of a story, you help your child analyze the meaning of what he or she has heard, read, or viewed. Every time you ask your child to explain information—whether from a graph, cartoon, or news report—you help your child develop skills needed for success in school and on these tests.

New York State's public schools invite you to take an active role in your child's education both at home and at school. Your involvement can lead to better attendance, higher test scores, and a greater likelihood that your child will continue on to higher education.



# How Parents Can Help

Parents can play an important role in helping their children to do well in school and to prepare for these tests.

Here are some things you can do:

- **Talk with your child's teacher.**
  Getting to know your child's teacher is an excellent way to stay informed about your child's performance at school. Attending parent-teacher conferences and school events is a good way to maintain regular communication with your child's teacher.
- **Be supportive throughout the year.**
  Make sure your child comes to school ready to learn, attends school regularly, and completes all homework assignments. Ask your child about his or her performance in school, and be generous with praise.
- **Encourage good work habits.**
  You can help your child learn good work habits at home and at school. Explain the importance of carefully following directions, avoiding careless errors, and checking work to make sure it's done correctly.
- **Present a positive attitude toward the tests.**
  Let your child know that you have confidence in his or her abilities. Explain that some of the test questions may be difficult and that it does not matter if other students finish earlier. Let your child know it is okay to proceed at his or her own pace.
- **Be sure your child is physically prepared on the day of the test.**
  Taking a test requires a student's full attention, so your child should have a good night's sleep before the test. Make sure your child has a healthy breakfast and a nutritious lunch.

# The English Language Arts Test

The English Language Arts Test is administered in two or three sessions depending on the grade. The test includes both literary and informational passages and measures the skills and knowledge specified in the English Language Arts Learning Standards.

Students read both literary and informational passages and then answer questions that test their understanding of what they read. They also listen to a short passage and then respond to what they heard, demonstrating their listening comprehension.

Students will be asked to draw conclusions, compare and contrast information and ideas, interpret meaning, and explain cause-and-effect relationships. At Grades 4, 6, and 8, students will also be scored on their use of writing skills to effectively communicate ideas and information, and on their use of correct sentence structure, spelling, grammar, and vocabulary. At Grades 3, 5, and 7, students will be given an editing task to assess their writing skills.

The English Language Arts Test contains questions in a variety of formats, including multiple-choice, short-response, and extended-response questions, as well as editing tasks.

For multiple-choice questions, students select the correct response from four answer choices. For short- and extended-response questions, students write an answer to an open-ended question. Extended responses are scored for writing as well as for reading comprehension. For the editing task, students are required to make corrections and revisions to a short piece of writing.

The following pages show examples of the types of questions that will appear on the test for each grade.



# Sample English Language Arts Questions

The **complete text** and answers to these sample questions, as well as additional sample questions and answers, can be found in the *Introduction to the Grades 3–8 Testing Program in English Language Arts and Mathematics* at http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/3-8.

## *Grade 3*

### Multiple Choice

The student reads a story about a chipmunk who notices that his animal friends are wearing their pants legs folded up. He asks each animal why but no one is sure of the reason for the new style. Then he asks Bear who says he folded them up to keep his pants from getting wet when he crossed the river. The student then chooses the most appropriate response to the following question.

According to the story, which animal started the new style?

**A** Bear
**B** Beaver
**C** Rabbit
**D** Squirrel

### Editing Task

The student is given a paragraph and asked to correct errors in capitalization and punctuation.

Here is a paragraph a student wrote. The paragraph has some mistakes in capital letters and punctuation. Some sentences may have no mistakes. There are no mistakes in spelling.

Read the paragraph and find the mistakes. Draw a line through each mistake in the paragraph. Then write the correction above it.

```
   Winter is a fun season. It snows a lot where
i live. I like to play in the snow. My Brother
likes to play in the snow, too. We make
snowballs and snow houses. when it gets dark, we
go inside, but we know we can go out again the
next day?
```

## *Grade 4*

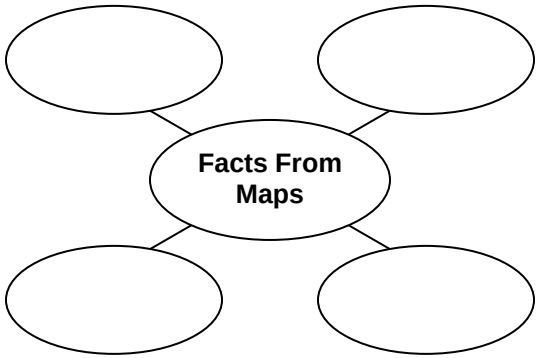
### Short Response

The student reads an article about the usefulness of maps that includes the following paragraph:

You can use different maps to find different kinds of facts. A road map shows you how to find your way. Other maps show which crops are grown in different places. Maps can show how many people live in different places. Some maps show what the weather is like. Some maps tell you about the land. These maps might show mountains or tell how high the land is above sea level.

The student then fills in the following web:

What are **four** different kinds of facts you can learn from maps? Write your answer in the empty circles of the web below.






## *Grade 5*

### Short Response

The student reads a poem about floating down a river. The student then describes the meaning of a specific phrase in the poem.

What is the "right place" mentioned in the title of the poem? Use details from the poem to support your answer.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

### Editing Task

The student is asked to edit a short passage.

Here is a report a student wrote. There are some mistakes in the paragraph. Some sentences may have more than one mistake, and other sentences may contain no mistakes at all. There are no mistakes in spelling.

Read the paragraph and find the mistakes. Draw a line through each mistake in the paragraph. Then write the correction above it.

Last weekend, my family and I went to the new aquarium downtown. It is one of the most largest aquariums in the state. When we first arrive at the aquarium, we saw real otters sharks, and penguins. Then we went to the aquarium's Theater and saw a show called "The amazing Oceans." I learned about different oceans across the world and about interesting creatures that lives in those oceans. It was so much fun to visit the aquarium. I can't wait to go back!

## *Grade 6*

### Extended Response

The student reads a passage about an African American woman, a former slave, who set out across the country around the time of the Civil War to speak out against slavery and about women's rights. Then the student writes an essay about why the woman decided to change her name.

Why do you think Sojourner Truth changed her name from the one she was given when she was born? Was her choice of name a good one? Write an essay in which you explain why Sojourner Truth changed her name, what that name represented to her, and whether the name was a good choice. Use details from the article to support your answer.

In your answer, be sure to include:

- why Sojourner Truth changed her name
- what her new name represented to her
- whether her new name was a good choice
- details from the article to support your answer

Check your writing for correct spelling, grammar, and punctuation.



## *Grade 7*

The student reads an article by a person who traveled to Nepal and returned with four objects of special importance. Then the student answers the following questions.

### Multiple Choice

Why did the author **most likely** write the article?

**A** to encourage readers to be friendly to others
**B** to describe souvenirs brought back from Nepal
**C** to teach readers how to prepare for hiking trips
**D** to explain a lesson learned while traveling in Nepal

### Short Response

In the chart below, write the reason each object is special to the author.

| Object | Why It Is Special |
|---|---|
| Sherpa walking stick | |
| Tall walking stick | |
| Yak bell | |

### *Grade 8*

The student reads an article about the woman known as the Unsinkable Molly Brown, one of the survivors of the *Titanic*. Then the student answers the following questions.

**Short Response**

The chart below lists information from two tall tales about Molly Brown. Using information from the article, complete the chart by explaining which part of the tall tale was true and which was made up.

| Tall Tales About Molly Brown | What Was True | What Was Made Up |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Molly Brown traveled west in a prairie schooner that was robbed by Jesse James. | | |
| 2. Molly Brown, while dressed only in her underwear, took command of a lifeboat as the *Titanic* sank. | | |

**Extended Response**

The author of "The Unsinkable Molly Brown" writes that Molly Brown was so famous that people wrote tall tales about her. Why do you think people were so interested in her? Do you think her fame was deserved? Write an essay in which you explain your opinion of Molly Brown. Use details from the article to support your answer.

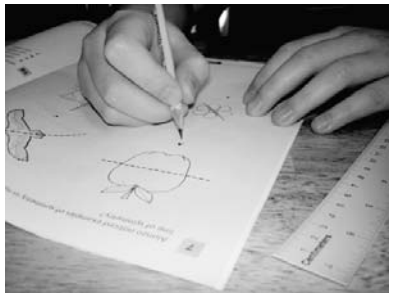
In your answer, be sure to tell:

- why Molly Brown was so famous
- whether Molly Brown deserved to be famous
- logical reasons to support your opinion
- details from the article to explain your answer

Check your writing for correct spelling, grammar, and punctuation.



# The Mathematics Test



The Mathematics Test is given in two or three sessions, depending on the grade. The multiple-choice questions measure basic skills, concepts, and procedures. The short-response and extended-response questions require students to support their answers by showing their work or explaining how they arrived at their answers.

Questions that ask students to show their solutions, or to explain the mathematics they used, measure students' understanding of mathematical procedures and problem-solving strategies.

On the Mathematics Test, students must

- understand what each question is asking
- know and apply facts and definitions
- select, apply, and modify procedures
- read and interpret graphs and tables
- recognize, interpret, and apply the signs, symbols, and terms used to represent concepts

Some questions will require measuring tools such as rulers, counters, pattern blocks, and protractors. These tools will be provided during testing.

Calculators are used in Grades 7 and 8 for short-response and extended-response questions only. These questions require a scientific calculator. Calculators must *not* be used for other sessions of the Grades 7 and 8 tests or for the Grades 3 through 6 tests because these tests assess student proficiency involving calculations.

The following pages show examples of the types of questions that will appear on the test for each grade.

# Sample Mathematics Questions

The **complete text** and answers to these sample questions, as well as additional sample questions and answers, can be found in *Appendix B Sample Mathematics Questions* at http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/3-8.

## *Grade 3*

### Multiple Choice

Sam and Jenna have been saving pennies. Sam has 232 pennies, and Jenna has 151 pennies. How many more pennies does Sam have than Jenna?

**A** 71
**B** 81
**C** 121
**D** 181



### Extended Response

The pictograph below shows the number of books read by students in five different classes during the month of January.

**BOOKS READ IN JANUARY**

| Class Teacher | Number of Books |
|---|---|
| Mrs. Smith | ☐ ☐ ☐ |
| Mr. Johnson | ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ |
| Ms. Carpenter | ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ |
| Mr. Grey | ☐ ☐ |
| Ms. Oliver | ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ |

| KEY |
|---|
| ☐ = 5 Books |

***Part A***

Which teacher's class read exactly 20 books?

***Answer*** _____

***Part B***

How many more books would Mr. Johnson's class have to read to make a total of 50 books?

***Show your work.***

***Answer*** _____ books

## *Grade 4*

### Short Response

Anna is trying to save some money by putting one-dollar bills in a jar each month. The table below shows the total number of one-dollar bills in the jar at the end of each month.

**ONE-DOLLAR BILLS SAVED**

| Number of Months | Number of One-Dollar Bills |
|---|---|
| 1 | 3 |
| 2 | 6 |
| 3 | 9 |
| 4 | 12 |

If the pattern continues, how many one-dollar bills will Anna have in the jar at the end of seven months?

***Show your work.***

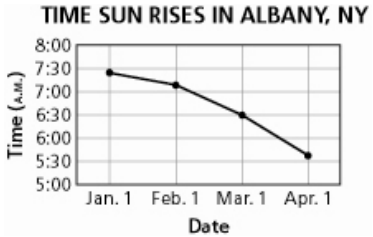
***Answer*** _____ one-dollar bills



## *Grade 5*

### Extended Response

On the first day of each month, Suzanne records the time the sun rises in Albany, New York. She uses the line graph below.




***Part A***

At approximately what time did the sun rise on April 1?

***Answer*** _____ A.M.

***Part B***

On which date did the sun rise at 6:30 A.M.?

***Answer*** _____

***Part C***

Based on the graph, describe the change in the time the sun rises during the first three months of the year.

_____

_____

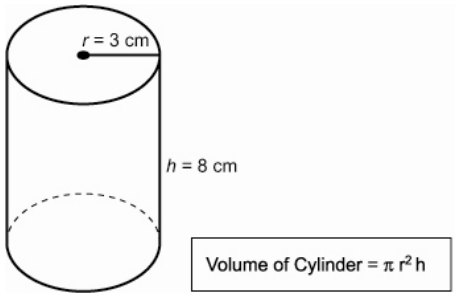
_____

_____

## *Grade 6*

### Multiple Choice

The volume of a cylinder with radius *r* and height *h* is found by using the formula below.

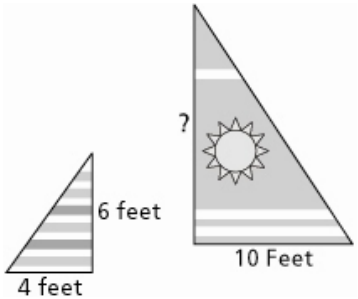



What is the volume of the cylinder?

**A** 24π
**B** 48π
**C** 72π
**D** 96π

### Short Response

The diagram below shows two sails from a sailboat. The sails are similar triangles.




What is the height of the larger sail?

***Show your work.***

***Answer*** _____ feet



## *Grade 7*

### Multiple Choice

A scientist measures the mass of a rock and finds that it is 0.16 kilogram. What is the mass of the rock in grams?

**A** 1.6
**B** 16
**C** 160
**D** 1,600

### Extended Response

The table below shows the favorite breakfast foods of Emily's 20 classmates.

**FAVORITE BREAKFAST FOODS**

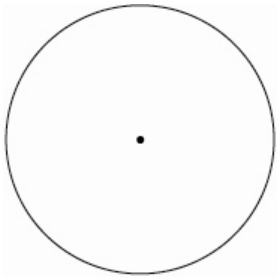
| Favorite Food | Number of Classmates |
|---|---|
| Cereal | 9 |
| Eggs | 5 |
| Sausage | 4 |
| Other | 2 |

Use your protractor to make a circle graph below to display the data.

***Show your work.***

Be sure to

- title your circle graph
- label each section of your circle graph



## *Grade 8*

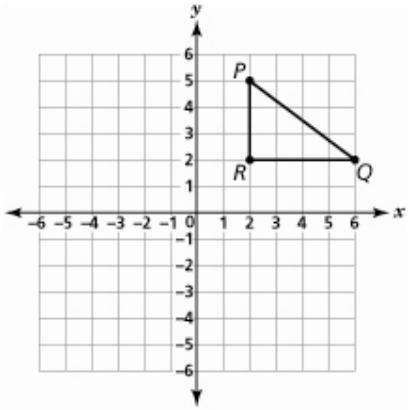
### Multiple Choice

The regular price of a CD is $18.00. If the CD is on sale for 15% off the regular price, what is the sale price?

**A** $2.70
**B** $15.30
**C** $16.20
**D** $16.50

### Extended Response

Triangle *PQR* is plotted on the grid below.




***Part A***

On the grid above, draw the image of △*PQR* reflected in the *x*-axis. Label the vertices *P′*, *Q′*, and *R′*.

On the lines below, explain how you decided where to locate *P′*.

_____

_____

_____

***Part B***

On the grid above, draw the image of △*P′Q′R′* reflected in the *y*-axis. Label the vertices *P″*, *Q″*, and *R″*.



# Glossary of Testing Terms Used in This Guide

**Editing task**

A task in which students are required to make corrections and revisions to a short piece of writing.

**Extended-response question**

A task in which students are required to write an answer to a question rather than choose from several answer choices. In the English Language Arts Test, the extended-response question requires students to write a brief essay based on a passage they have listened to or read. In the Mathematics Test, the extended-response questions contain multiple parts and require students to show how they arrived at their answers.

**Field test**

A preliminary version of a test, administered in order to gather data about the test questions. The test is administered to students—including students with disabilities—at selected schools. These schools are selected to provide a representative sample of the student population of the state.

**Individualized Education Program (IEP)**

An educational plan for any student with learning disabilities. An IEP is a modification of the standard education program and contains specially designed instructions based on the student's unique academic, social, and behavioral needs.

**Limited English Proficient (LEP)**

Students whose native language is any language other than English. Special testing accommodations can be made for these students in the classroom and during testing.

**Multiple-choice question**

A test question for which a student chooses, rather than writes, an answer. Students select the correct response from four answer choices.

**New York State Board of Regents**

Established in 1784, the Regents of The University of the State of New York form the oldest, continuous state education entity in America. The Regents are responsible for the general supervision of all educational activities within the State, presiding over The University and the New York State Education Department.

**New York State Learning Standards**

State-prescribed descriptions of what students should know and be able to do in different content areas and at different grade levels.

**No Child Left Behind (NCLB)**

Federal legislation aimed at improving the quality of education nationally by increasing accountability for states, school districts, and schools. The law requires that all states receiving federal funding are to test students in Grades 3 through 8—including students with disabilities—in English language arts and mathematics to measure yearly progress.

**Short-response question**

A task in which students are required to write a short answer to a question rather than choose from several answer choices.



# For More Information

If you want to know more about specific topics related to the Grades 3–8 Testing Program, please visit the following web sites:

**Latest News on Grades 3-8 Testing**

http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/3-8/home.html

**New York State Education Department Parent Resources**

http://usny.nysed.gov/parents/

**Office of State Assessment**

http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/osa

**Office of Curriculum and Instructional Support**

http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/cis/home.html

**Information on the Use of Calculators**

http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/3-8/7-8calculators.htm

**General Information on Testing Accommodations**

http://www.vesid.nysed.gov/specialed/publications/policy/testaccess/guide.htm