



Assistant Commissioner
Office of Assessment, Standards and Curriculum

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TO: District Superintendents
Superintendents of Public and Nonpublic Schools
Principals of Public and Nonpublic Schools
Leaders of Charter Schools
Superintendents of State-Operated and State Supported Schools
Superintendents of Special Act School Districts

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SUBJECT: Interpreting Scores on the 2013-14 New York State Alternate Assessment

This memorandum provides guidance on how to interpret scores on the 2013-14 New York State Alternate Assessment (NYSAA).

Background

Beginning with the 2013-14 school year, the NYSAA measures the progress of students with severe disabilities on the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics.¹ Committees of teachers, including special education teachers, served as content experts to set student performance expectations (called “Extensions”) for the NYSAA on a narrowed depth and breadth of the CCLS (called “Essence Statements”). For example, while the Grade 3 ELA Test measures a learning standard that requires that students “Determine the main ideas and supporting details of a text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally,” the NYSAA requires that students “Determine the main ideas and supporting details of a variety of materials presented in diverse formats” (the “Essence Statement”). To ease administration, the New York State Education Department (NYSED) also revised the NYSAA in science and social studies. In July 2013, NYSED released a memo outlining the process taken to develop, as well as the characteristics of, the new assessments. The memo can be found at <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/assessment/nysaa/2013-14/transitiontocommoncore.pdf>.

How Scores are Calculated on the New NYSAA

The NYSAA is a datafolio-style assessment in which a student is required to present evidence of proficiency on the standards, but it is up to the student’s teacher to determine

¹ A student with a severe disability may be medically excused from participation in the NYSAA when the student is too incapacitated to be tested because of an illness or injury. For further information see: <http://www.P12.nysed.gov/assessment/nysaa/2013-14/medicallyexcusedmemo.pdf>.

what that evidence is and how it is evaluated. Unlike a test such as the Regents Exam, in which all students take the same test questions that are all scored in the same way, the NYSAA allows flexibility in administration such that no two students in the State are required to be administered the same “questions.” As evidence of proficiency on the same Extension, one student might respond to four questions, while a different student might respond to seven questions, and yet another student may perform a task that is videotaped for scoring purposes. In other words, the NYSAA provides educators with the flexibility necessary to administer a developmentally appropriate standards-based assessment, while maintaining rigorous and comparable expectations for all students.

To compute a student’s score on the NYSAA, three factors are considered: (1) the **number of Extensions** (ELA & Math) or **Alternate Grade Level Indicators** (AGLIs - Science & Social Studies) on which the student was assessed, (2) the **level of complexity** of the tasks administered to the student, and (3) the **level of accuracy** that the student demonstrated on the tasks that he or she completed. These three factors yield a single score — known as a Performance Level — for each student that ranges from 1 to 4. Students receive a different score for each subject area. The interpretation of scores is explained in further detail below, but first it is helpful to understand in greater detail each of the three factors that contribute to a student’s score:

(1) Number of Extensions or AGLIs: For ELA and Math, students must provide evidence of proficiency on five Extensions. For Science and Social Studies, students must demonstrate evidence of proficiency on two AGLIs. The Extensions and AGLIs on which students are assessed are featured in the NYSAA frameworks, which are located at: <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/assessment/nysaa/nysaa-manual-15.html>.

(2) Level of Complexity: Students whose achievement is measured by the NYSAA have a wide range of knowledge, skills, and understanding. To account for this wide range, for each Extension or AGLI, students can be assessed on tasks that are considered “low complexity,” “middle complexity,” or “high complexity.”

(3) Level of Accuracy: Although the NYSAA does not have a set of test questions that are administered to all students in a standardized fashion, all students must nonetheless provide evidence of their knowledge, skill, and understanding on each Extension and AGLI, and this evidence must be scored by a qualified educator. Scores for the “Level of Accuracy” component range from 0% to 100%. If, for example, a student is asked to complete a four-question worksheet and the student gets three of the four questions correct, the student’s “Level of Accuracy” for that Extension is 75 percent.

To determine a student’s score of Level 1, Level 2, Level 3, or Level 4, the student’s Level of Accuracy on a task is weighted by the Level of Complexity of that same task, and the weighted accuracy scores are then combined with the scores from other tasks in the subject area to create a single, composite number for each student. The cut scores, which are discussed in greater detail in the next section, are then applied to this single number, resulting in the student’s final score. There are a large number of possible combinations of

number of tasks, complexities, and accuracies — there were over 1,200 possible unique combinations for ELA and mathematics — so computers are used to calculate a student's final score across all of the factors that contribute to the student's score. For the 2013-14 NYSAA, once scores were recorded for students, these data were provided by schools to the State via their Level 1 Regional Information Centers (RICs) or Big 5 City District data centers. Using the data provided by schools, the Department calculated each student's final NYSAA score, ranging from 1 to 4.

Note that, in the past, there was a factor called “Level of Independence” that also contributed to a student's score. The new NYSAA for ELA, mathematics, science, and social studies does not incorporate the Level of Independence (the degree to which a student was prompted on a task) into a student's score. Teachers are allowed to provide students with verbal or physical cues or prompts to refocus the student on the assessment task, but are not allowed to provide content or construct supports that will guide the student to the correct answer. A student's score report will include the number of tasks on which a student was prompted or provided a cue on NYSAA.

How the Cut Scores were Established on the New NYSAA

In June 2014, over 130 New York State educators (also called panelists) met in Albany to set performance standards and cut scores for the new NYSAA in ELA, mathematics, science, and social studies. These panelists included special education teachers (both those who do and do not regularly work with students who take the NYSAA), general education teachers, English as a second language educators, K-12 school administrators, and educators from higher education. Panelists were charged with determining the knowledge, skills, and understanding necessary for students to achieve each of the four performance levels.

To set these cut points between each of the four performance levels, a standard-setting process known as the “Body of Work Method” was used. This method requires that panelists examine actual student datafolios from the 2013-14 NYSAA administration and classify each datafolio into Level 1, Level 2, Level 3, or Level 4. This classification is based on detailed descriptions of the performance needed to achieve each level; the knowledge, skills, and understanding students are expected to be able to display for each level; and how well the student performed on the assessed Extension or AGLI as shown in evidence included in the datafolio. For example, a more complex datafolio in which a student demonstrated marginal accuracy may be categorized as a Level 3 datafolio, whereas a lower-complexity datafolio in which the student demonstrated a greater degree of accuracy might be categorized as a Level 2 datafolio. This methodology has been successfully used for similar portfolio assessment programs in other states, and is particularly beneficial for the NYSAA because students are not required to take the same set of test questions as is the case with other NYSED testing programs.

When new tests that measure student progress on more rigorous learning standards are implemented, the proportion of students scoring “proficient” tends to be lower than it had been in prior years when measuring student progress on the prior learning standards. However, in order to maintain continuity with prior year results as the full phase-in of the

NYSAA continues over the next few years, the Department instructed panelists to recommend final cut scores in which the decrease in the proportion of proficient students on the NYSAA was held at a level that did not differ from the decrease historically seen with other testing programs with the introduction of more rigorous learning standards. Final cut scores were recommended by the panelists, accepted by the Commissioner, and used to determine the performance level for each student who took the 2013-14 NYSAA.

Interpreting Scores on the New NYSAA

The NYSAA scores range from 1 to 4, and are synonymous with the four performance levels for the NYSAA. The performance levels are as follows:

NYSAA Level 4:	Meets the Alternate Grade Level Achievement Standards with Distinction
NYSAA Level 3:	Meets the Alternate Grade Level Achievement Standards
NYSAA Level 2:	Partially Meets the Alternate Grade Level Achievement Standards
NYSAA Level 1:	Does Not Meet the Alternate Grade Level Achievement Standards

Students who score Level 3 or Level 4 on the NYSAA are considered “Proficient.”

Importantly, because the 2013-14 NYSAA has a new design and, for ELA and mathematics, measures new standards, one must exercise caution when comparing scores from the 2013-14 NYSAA to scores from previous versions of the NYSAA. Specifically:

- The “raw scores” from the pre-2013-14 NYSAA that resulted from adding up the individual 1-4 ratings from a student’s Data Summary Sheet are not comparable to the 2013-14 NYSAA raw scores. For this reason, it is not possible to create a raw score or scale score-based “comparison chart” that shows how a student’s performance on prior versions of the NYSAA compares to his or her performance on the 2013-14 NYSAA.
- Performance levels on the prior version of the NYSAA and on the 2013-14 NYSAA can be compared in terms of the degree to which a student has met the grade level expectations set forth by the State, but not in terms of what types of content, skills, or knowledge that the student has. For example, it is possible to say that “because a student was a NYSAA Level 3 last year and is again a NYSAA Level 3 this year, the student is still meeting grade-level expectations;” however, it is not permissible to say that “because a student was a NYSAA Level 3 last year and is again a NYSAA Level 3 this year, the student has grown by one grade level in terms of his or her knowledge, skills, and understanding.”
- As with previous versions of the NYSAA, the new version of the NYSAA is not itself a measure of growth. The new baseline is designed to determine only if a student is taking on tasks of an appropriate complexity level. In order to more accurately set individualized targets for student learning, educators may look at multiple sources of student performance to better understand the knowledge and skills students have at the beginning of the academic school year. Assessment tasks and level of complexity remain consistent between the NYSAA baseline and final data point

measures, allowing educators to look for growth in percent accuracy across each task individually. For additional information about how the NYSAA may yield inferences about student growth when used in conjunction with a Student Learning Outcome (SLO), see:

<https://www.engageny.org/resource/using-the-nysaa-in-the-development-of-slos>.

Note that, as with prior versions of the NYSAA, students are expected to complete all of the tasks administered to them as part of the assessment (i.e., five tasks for the ELA and Mathematics NYSAs and two tasks for Science and Social Studies NYSAs). Incomplete evidence for one or more tasks will lower the student's performance level.

More information on the NYSAA and other State assessments is available on the Department's web site at <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/assessment/>. If you have specific questions concerning this memorandum or the NYSAA, please call 518-474-5900 or e-mail emscassessinfo@mail.nysed.gov.