



Assistant Commissioner  
Office of Assessment, Standards and Curriculum

July 2013

**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

**FROM:** Candace H. Shyer, Assistant Commissioner

**SUBJECT:** The Transition of the New York State Alternate Assessment (NYSAA) to Measure the P-12 Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS)

This memorandum provides information on the transition to the 2013-14 NYSAA that will measure the knowledge and skills of students with severe cognitive disabilities on the CCLS in English language arts and mathematics.

### Background

The New York State Board of Regents (BOR) committed to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in January 2010 and formally adopted the CCSS for English Language Arts (ELA) & Literacy and Mathematics in July 2010 and incorporated New York State's specific additions, creating the New York State P-12 CCLS in January 2011. In December 2010, the Board of Regents announced that student progress on these standards will be measured in grades 3-8 through State assessments beginning in the 2012-13 school year (<http://engageny.org/resource/common-core-implementation-timeline>). Student progress on the CCLS in high school will be measured by State tests that will be phased in beginning in June 2014. For students with severe cognitive disabilities, student progress on the CCLS will be measured beginning with the 2013-14 administration of the NYSAA in ELA and mathematics.

To align the ELA and mathematics NYSAA with the CCLS, the Office of State Assessment and the Office of Special Education began work in November 2011 to develop an alternate assessment to measure the CCLS for students with severe cognitive disabilities. NYSAA will continue to be a datafolio-style assessment that includes student performance data, as well as evidence.

Committees of teachers, who served as content experts, and special educators were brought together to review the CCLSs for the content identified in the new test blueprint,

develop Essence statements to narrow the depth and breadth of the CCLS, and draft “Extensions” (the new Extensions are analogous to the current Alternate Grade Level Indicators). Extensions are descriptions of student performance expectations that are aligned to the CCLS for students with severe cognitive disabilities. The proposed Essences and Extensions were reviewed extensively during the summer of 2012, and draft documents were posted for public comment in September 2012. In October 2012, the committees were reconvened to review the revisions to the Essences and Extensions, and to draft Assessment Tasks to measure student performance on the CCLS. Following the meeting, the draft Assessment Tasks were reviewed and vetted by content and special education teachers, and then were posted for public comment from December 2012 to January 2013. Public comments from the first review and the second review were incorporated, as appropriate, into the draft Extensions and draft Assessment Tasks.

Test blueprints for the NYSAA that measure the Extensions to the CCLS in ELA and mathematics were approved in spring 2012 and will be posted in July 2013 at <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/assessment/nysaa/>. These test blueprints for the NYSAA were developed from the test blueprints for the Common Core grades 3-8 and high school State assessments.

### Summary of the 2013-14 ELA and Mathematics NYSAA

The following summarizes important points related to the new 2013-14 NYSAA test design:

- The new NYSAA test design maintains key components of the previous test design, but is intentionally focused on increasing the validity of test scores. The key components are that alternate standards aligned to the grade-level learning standards are still assessed, there are still Assessment Tasks that are built to measure the Extensions, and various Extensions are still available at varying levels of complexity.
- The NYSAA is based on academic content derived from the CCLS approved by the BOR. The scope of the content has been narrowed to the greatest extent possible to design an assessment appropriate and yet challenging for students with severe cognitive disabilities. Datafolios for each student will include evidence for five Extensions per content area in ELA and mathematics. Extensions and Assessment Tasks at varying levels of complexity are available to ensure that students can appropriately access the CCLS.
- Baseline data will be collected at the start of the school year. The purpose of the baseline administration is to ensure that the student is being assessed at an appropriate level of complexity. Verifying evidence will be required for both the baseline and final administrations. No major changes are anticipated in requirements for valid verifying evidence.
- In the past, a student’s NYSAA score was composed of two elements: the Level of Accuracy and the Level of Independence (recorded as percentages based on the

numbers of steps, items, or problems presented). On the new NYSAA, the Level of Independence will no longer be a factor in scoring a student's datafolio; however, information regarding Independence in the form of prompts and cues the student received will still be captured on the Data Summary Sheet. That is, a student's official score will be based purely on the Level of Accuracy, but helpful formative data will be shared with teachers and parents about the degree to which each student was independent when engaging in the assessment task.

- In the past, a student's score was composed of scores on two Assessment Tasks, each performed on three occasions. On the new NYSAA, students may attempt Assessment Tasks as many times as they wish; however, only the final administration will count toward a student's score. Additionally, whereas in the past only two Alternate Grade Level Indicators (AGLIs) were measured, on the new NYSAA, teachers will measure five Extensions for ELA and five for mathematics. This will allow the Department to collect much more valuable information on student attainment of the CCLS than before. The number of standards has increased from two to five; however, the administration procedures have become less complex with far fewer choice components (virtually the only choice component now is the level of complexity). This allows the assessment to focus on the most important content, while decreasing complicated administrative procedures.
- Datafolios will continue to be scored regionally, and the amount of time needed for scoring is not expected to increase or decrease with the changes to this assessment.
- The NYSAA will have a series of crosswalks from the Career Development and Occupational Studies (CDOS) standards to the NYSAA Essences statements and Extensions. Each of the five standards in ELA and mathematics will have statements showing the connection to Career Development, Integrated Learning, and Universal Foundation Skills, as links to career readiness for this group of students. An example of a Grade 7 ELA Essence statement is "Recognize the argument and specific claims in a text, and cite relevant textual evidence to support the explicit or inferred claims in a text." The Career Development Knowledge crosswalks are "Use text (words, picture symbols, sentences) to evaluate information needed to take action or make decisions", and "Name specific jobs and the qualifications needed for each."

### State-Wide Training on the New NYSAA

There is a substantial network of professionals in New York State who are associated with the NYSAA. In fall 2013, training on the NYSAA will be provided to the Alternate Assessment Training Network Specialists and the Regional Lead Trainers, who are located throughout New York State. These individuals, through a train-the-trainer model, will train teachers who will administer the new NYSAA. This training work will be conducted using new training manuals and DVDs that will be distributed to every district in the State. The networks associated with the NYSAA continue to be a key aspect of the NYSAA's success.

## Plans to transition the NYSAA in Science and Social Studies

We are currently internally discussing changes to the NYSAA in science and social studies. The tentative strategy is to enact a two-phased transition process. During the first phase, which will begin with the 2013-14 school year, the administrative procedures of the social studies and science exams will begin to mirror those for ELA and mathematics outlined above. During the second phase, which will likely begin 1-2 years after the transition of the general education science and social studies exams to new standards, the NYSAA will be built to provide extensions for any new content standards adopted by the BOR.

### Standard Setting

In June 2014, there will be a new standard setting for all content areas (ELA, mathematics, science, and social studies). During this standard setting process, educators from throughout the State will work together to make recommendations to the Commissioner as to what the cut scores should be on the new exams. At this time, there will also be a new scale for the NYSAA.

As always, the NYSAA is only a part of the overall picture of students' knowledge, skills, and understandings. The NYSAA should continue to be part of an overall educational program that includes curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Any questions regarding the NYSAA may be emailed to [emscassessinfo@mail.nysed.gov](mailto:emscassessinfo@mail.nysed.gov).

- c. Directors of Special Education  
NYSAA Regional Lead Trainers  
NYSAA Training Network Specialists