

2021 Grades 3-8 English Language Arts (ELA) & Mathematics State Assessments Frequently Asked Questions

- 1. The 2021 Grades 3-8 ELA and Math tests were administered at an extraordinary time for schools, communities, and families. What was different about these tests from prior years?**

The Department provided schools with more flexibility in scheduling the Spring 2021 operational tests because of the various methods of instruction used across the state in response to COVID-19. Students who received entirely remote instruction did not have to come to school only for testing.

In addition, the Department required schools to administer only Session 1 of the ELA and Mathematics Tests (the multiple-choice session) to students and only student scores on the Session 1 test questions contributed to students' total scores for the tests. Also, the Department further reduced the length of the tests by removing the embedded multiple-choice field test questions and the tests contained prior years' questions.

- 2. Why were prior years' test questions used?**

The decision to use previously administered test questions was based on guidance from nationally recognized experts in the assessment field. Reusing test questions provided the benefit of having established scale scores and stable item parameters. Although it was not the driver of the decision, the reuse of previously administered test questions also provided an opportunity for cost savings.

- 3. Why aren't student performance results reported for the entire state as has been done in prior years?**

Due to the pandemic, approximately 4 out of 10 enrolled students participated in state assessments in 2020-21. That represents less than half of New York's student population. Because only 40% of students' results are available, these state assessment results are not representative of the state's student population and it would be irresponsible to release data at a statewide level. The results should not be compared statewide or by statewide subgroup, or with prior years' results. As a result, the Department is not making statewide comparisons of the data and only district and school level results are posted [on the Department's website](#).

4. How can the test results be used by districts, schools and teachers given the wide variation in test taking?

Test results may be used at the local level to help shape students' individualized learning. Although comparisons should not be made statewide, the results can still provide a snapshot of student attainment in the learning standards at the student and classroom levels and, in some cases, at the school and district levels, depending on what percentage of students took the tests. This allows educators to not only see how individual students are doing but to assess what is working in the classroom and what isn't and make adjustments. Results can also be used to help educators better understand their students' needs to provide supports more effectively.

5. What do the results mean on an individual basis for each student who took the tests?

At the student level, the results show the student's understanding of the state learning standards when the test was given. The results can be used to help educators better understand their students' needs to provide supports more effectively.

6. What is the best way for communities and families to consider test results for their students and schools?

State assessments are valuable to educators and parents. In an ordinary year, the tests help identify achievement and opportunity gaps within districts and schools. On the classroom and student levels, state assessments are one tool used to offer program support for teachers and individualized support for students.

For families, the results show their child's understanding of the state learning standards when the test was given. The test score provides one way to understand student performance; however, this score does not tell the whole story about what students know and can do. Along with other measures of student learning, the tests provide data on a student's attainment in the state learning standards and help shape individualized learning plans to best meet that student's needs.

The results from the 2021 Grades 3-8 ELA and Mathematics Tests are provided for diagnostic purposes and are not included in official transcripts or permanent student records. As families review their child's results for the 2021 tests, they should keep in mind the changes that were made to this year's tests due to the COVID-19 pandemic as detailed in response to question 1 of this document.

7. How will schools determine student needs, such as Academic Intervention Services (AIS), for the 2021-2022 school year if they do not have test results for all students?

In response to the limited administration of state assessments during the 2020-21 school year, the Department provided flexibility for the two-step identification process for AIS for students enrolled in grades 3-8. The first step is to review the grades 3-8 assessment data for the student and the second step uses criteria defined by the district. Specifically, schools may make an identification based solely on district-developed procedures applicable to all grade 3-8 students during the 2021-22 school year.

8. What information is available for families of students who did not take the tests?

Schools use a number of strategies throughout the school year to assess student learning so appropriate services and supports can be provided. Teachers use multiple means to provide a full picture of the learning that takes place, such as locally and teacher-developed assessments, vendor-developed assessments, coursework and project-based assignments. Families should speak with their child's teacher to find out what information is available at the school level.

9. Why was the release of information about the 2021 tests later than usual when fewer students took the tests last year?

Due to the extraordinary circumstances under which the 2021 assessments were administered, there was a need for additional analyses to support appropriate interpretations of the results.

10. Will there be changes in school and district accountability measures due to the wide variation in student testing?

As part of ongoing efforts to determine the most appropriate timeline and manner for re-starting the ESSA accountability system, the Department is reviewing available data to identify appropriate adjustments to how individual accountability indicators are calculated, as well as potential adjustments to other determination processes. Any proposed adjustments will need to be approved by the U.S. Department of Education.

11. What will the 2022 tests be like? When will the tests measure the Next Generation Learning Standards?

The 2022 Grades 3-8 ELA and math tests will return to a two-session format measuring the current learning standards. The Spring 2023 Grades 3-8 Tests will be the first administration measuring the Next Generation Learning Standards.