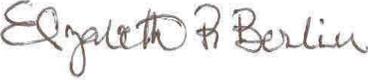




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TO: BOCES District Superintendents
Superintendents of Public Schools
Administrators of Public and Nonpublic Schools
Charter School Leaders

FROM: Elizabeth R. Berlin 

SUBJECT: Opportunities to Participate in Grades 3-8 Computer-Based Testing

In May of 2012, the Department announced a plan to transition to computer-based testing (CBT) as part of its commitment to meeting the needs of 21st century learners, while at the same time improving test delivery, test integrity, scoring validity, and turn-around time on testing results. To make this transition, the New York State Education Department (NYSED) recently awarded a five year contract to Questar Assessment, Inc. to develop the State's 3-8 English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics assessments and provide all schools with the option of administering these tests on computers.

NYSED is planning a gradual approach to implementing CBT with extensive support and communication. In the 2015-16 school year all operational assessments will be administered on paper, but schools will have the option of administering the stand-alone field tests by computer or paper. Beginning with the 2016-17 school year, schools will have the option of administering the operational tests as well as the stand-alone field tests by either computer or paper. It will be at the discretion of the local school and school district whether each school will administer the tests by paper or computer each year. The Department's contractor, Questar Assessment, Inc., will continue to provide both computer and paper tests for the duration of the contract.

This transition to CBT benefits students and educators by enabling faster turnaround of results, more timely release of test questions, release of a larger proportion of the test questions, and fewer stand-alone field tests. NYSED is encouraging schools to participate in computer-based, stand-alone field tests to help ascertain if they have the necessary devices and infrastructure to fully participate in computer-based-testing (CBT). Later this fall, NYSED will provide plans and a full calendar of supports to help districts and schools embark on the transition with careful planning and preparation.

Computer-Based Field Testing in 2015-16

The computer-based field testing window will be from Monday, May 23, 2016 through Friday, June 10, 2016. The paper-based field testing window will be from Tuesday, May 31, 2016 through Friday, June 10, 2016. Schools choosing computer-based field tests receive an additional week to administer the field tests.

School participation in computer-based field testing will be voluntary by school. Over the next few months when placing requests for 2015-16 elementary/intermediate-level operational tests, schools will be asked to indicate whether they would like to administer the 2016 Grades 3-8 stand-alone ELA and Mathematics field tests either in the traditional paper-based format or as computer-based tests. Then the Department will notify schools what grade level and content area they will be field testing.

As with the paper-based field tests, schools opting to administer a computer-based field test will be asked to administer the field test to all students in a single grade or in two adjacent grades in either ELA or mathematics. Schools will not be asked to field test in more than two grades or one content area. As with paper, all computer-based field tests will be one forty-minute session. Schools do not need to be prepared to test all students in a single grade on the same day or at the same time of day. Schools may administer the test to students at different times to allow more flexibility in scheduling the use of devices and computer labs.

Schools that participated in PARCC field tests in 2014 and 2015 found the experience valuable as a test of school readiness for CBT. NYSED encourages all schools to try out CBT in the field testing environment before transitioning to CBT for the operational assessment. Field testing on computer helps schools to assess their technical readiness and provides administrators, teachers, and students an opportunity to become familiar with CBT in a low-stakes testing environment. **NYSED strongly suggests that every district consider committing at least one school in the district to administer computer-based field tests in spring 2016.** This will help your school and district understand the requirements of CBT and begin to plan for a full rollout of CBT in the future.

Preparation for Computer-Based Testing

The computer-based tests developed by Questar Assessment, Inc. will be available on laptops, tablets, Chromebooks, and PCs. Research on CBT has shown that all allowable devices meeting the minimum technology requirements function equally well. Additional research also suggests that students perform similarly on assessment items across different devices. While this information is important, we encourage you to implement technology based on what teachers and students will use in the classroom as this regular interaction with technology in the classroom will ensure a smoother transition to CBT.

NYSED recommends that districts and schools select technology and devices based on instructional needs, not CBT. However, it is important to keep in mind the minimum specifications and technology infrastructure needed to support CBT. NYSED has worked with Questar Assessment, Inc. to outline the minimum technology requirements. That document, along with other resources and guidance, will be posted online at <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/technology/CBT>. NYSED will continue to publish CBT resources and documentation on this website.

Experience in New York with the PARCC field tests found that the biggest factor contributing to school success with CBT was staff planning and preparation. The Department will continue to collaborate with Regional Information Centers (RICs), BOCES, and district representatives to ensure field input as we build supports and resources.

To assist districts and schools with the implementation of CBT, NYSED and Questar Assessment, Inc. will be offering regional training opportunities. A calendar of regional training opportunities will be shared later this fall. In addition, a training platform and online practice tests for each grade level and content area will be available this winter, at least two months prior to field test administration. This will allow students and test administration staff to become familiar with the online testing environment, and will allow technical support personnel to verify proper configuration and functionality of the network and devices prior to a live test administration. The practice test will include a sample of items representing item types appropriate for familiarizing students with each system feature they will need to use during field testing. These items will be taken from NYSED-developed sample items or previously administered exams.

General Timeline for Computer-Based Testing

The following table outlines a general timeline for computer-based testing and the availability of some resources. NYSED will provide additional detail later in the fall.

Late Fall 2015:	Full calendar of dates with regional training opportunities Additional technical specifications and system readiness tools
Winter 2015-16:	Computer-based practice tests for each grade and content area Training platform for the test administration system
Spring 2016:	Computer-based field tests from May 23rd – June 10th No operational assessments on computers
Spring 2017	Computer-based field testing will be available Computer-based operational testing will be available

If you have any questions about these opportunities for your schools to participate in computer-based field tests, please contact us at emscassessinfo@nysed.gov. Thank you for your continued support of this important work.