**An educator’s GUIDE TO PARENT DISCUSSIONS ABOUT**

**the Grades 3-8 ELA and Math Assessments**

*This document is designed to serve as a guide for teachers and principals as they discuss the results of the 2015 Grades 3-8 English Language Arts and Math Tests with parents. It contains some of parents’ most frequently asked questions.*

**THE VALUE AND IMPORTANCE OF the annual assessments**

1. **Why is it important for my child to take this test?**

* Teachers need to understand how well students are progressing and where they need additional support or can be challenged more. These tests provide teachers with information that can be used to guide their instruction and provide additional support or more challenging material when students need it.
* Results from the annual assessments highlight achievement gaps among different student populations that need to be addressed to ensure that all students receive a high-quality education. Without widespread participation in the tests, school and district leaders cannot accurately provide the support and necessary resources to the students who need it.
* For each student, time spent taking the 3-8 ELA and Math exams only accounts for less than 1% of the school year.

1. **Why did New York need a new test?**

* New York students have been taking state tests for decades. Federal law requires that students are tested once annually in grades 3-8 in ELA and math. A new test was needed to measure the more rigorous, college and career readiness learning standards that are guiding classroom instruction today. These standards focus on skills students need in the real world, like critical thinking, analyzing, and problem solving.
* The annual exams replaced the old state tests. No additional state tests have been given to students since the more rigorous learning standards were adopted in 2010.

1. **Why is student proficiency lower now than on previous state tests (the ones administered prior to 2013)?**

* The new tests measure student progress against the new, more challenging standards and require students to explain their answers and defend their reasoning, which goes beyond what was asked of them previously. Because the new standards and the exams aligned to them set a higher bar, it was expected that scores would drop.

1. **Are changes being made to the testing program?**

* A new testing company (Questar Assessment) has been selected to develop future assessments. Double the number of New York State teachers will be involved in developing these exams to ensure that they closely measure the learning happening in the classroom.
* The State is also exploring computer-based testing platforms. Computer-based tests will eventually reduce the amount of time students spend on the test and provide results more quickly.
* In 2015, the state legislature provided new funding to make additional improvements to the testing program, including releasing more test questions and eventually making test scores available before the end of the school year.

**THE TESTS AND STUDENT RESULTS**

1. **My child is doing well in school and on her report card, but her test results do not seem to reflect this. What is the discrepancy?**

* The annual assessments are only one of several measures that show a child’s progress in ELA and math. Report card grades can include multiple indicators of a student’s performance such as participation, work habits, group projects, and homework, which are not reflected in the test results.
* For more information on how a child is performing in class, parents should talk to their child’s teacher.

1. **What does it mean if a student did not achieve a Level 3?**

* These tests are only one of several measures of how well a student is progressing against the more rigorous standards. Students who score at Level 3 or above in ELA or math are proficient in the standards for that grade.
* If a student scored at Level 2, he or she is partially proficient in the standards for that grade but has not fully met grade-level standards.
* Students scoring at Level 1 are below proficient and will need support to be successful in the next grade level.
* Students currently in grades 7 and 8 (the class of 2020 and 2021) who scored a Level 2 or higher on the 2015 exams are on track to meet current graduation requirements. However, a Level 2 score indicates that the student is not yet proficient in the higher learning standards.
* Students currently in grade 6 and lower (the class of 2022 and beyond) who scored a Level 3 or 4 on the 2015 exams are on track to meet graduation requirements for their class. Students scoring below a Level 3 are not on track to meet graduation requirements for their class.
* *Please note: This difference is due to a policy decision to have students in the class of 2022 and beyond meet more rigorous graduation requirements to demonstrate college and career readiness. It does not mean that the tests these students will take are more rigorous.*

1. **How will students’ results be used?**

* Results are used to identify where a child excels and can be challenged to go deeper into the subject matter, or where he or she needs extra support or practice.
* In both elementary and middle school, New York State law forbids the use of state tests results as the determining factor in placement or promotion.

1. **What types of questions are on the tests?**

* The questions require students to apply their knowledge and skills and explain their reasoning. Students spend time reading complex texts, writing well-reasoned responses, and solving real-world word problems, all of which are skills that are necessary for them to practice and master to succeed in college and careers.
* The test questions were developed specifically for New York students. Hundreds of teachers from across the state provided extensive feedback on the test questions. Example test questions from 2015 and previous years are available online at <http://www.engageny.org/3-8>.

1. **How can parents use their child’s student score report?**

* The student score report includes a breakdown of a child’s performance in different skill areas within each subject. This helps parents understand where their child is doing well and in what areas he or she may need additional practice. Parents can also use these results to guide a discussion with their child’s teacher about additional supports or challenges that may be needed in the classroom, as well as ways to support learning at home.
* To find resources parents can use at home, visit <https://www.engageny.org/educational-activities-for-parents-and-students> or <http://bealearninghero.org/learning-tools>.