

## Common Core & State Tests

## ELA/MATH

Beginning in 2013, the state assessments in English language arts (ELA) and math for grades 3-8 will be based on the shifts in the Common Core standards.

The tests may seem more difficult, at least at first, as students and teachers adjust to the new, more rigorous expectations.

There is a chance that the scores could drop in the first and second year of the tests. But remember that these tests are an important tool to help teachers see where students need extra support to move on to the next grade level.

Because the instruction leading up to the tests and the tests themselves are different, a drop in student scores should not be interpreted as failure on the part of your child to learn or the teacher to teach.

# Don't stress about the test

Some students thrive on test stress; others experience intense anxiety that leaves them physically ill – stomachaches, headaches, etc. – and unable to sleep.

With state standardized tests on the horizon, you can help your child prepare mentally and physically to face the task head on. These tips and techniques may not completely eliminate your child's stress, but they are tools that can empower your child to confront this challenge and others they will face in school and beyond.

- **Get enough sleep.** One study showed that students who got eight hours of sleep the night before a test were three times more likely to answer a question correctly than those who didn't. Adequate sleep – 8-10 hours per night – helps ensure children have the energy and stamina to make it through the test in top form.
- **Eat a healthy breakfast.** Start the day with a meal that includes complex carbohydrates and protein so energy lasts as long as possible. Eggs, cereal and whole-wheat toast give the brain what it needs to help you think more clearly and much longer compared to high-sugar selections. A healthy breakfast can boost memory and help a child be more alert – a definite recipe for test success!
- **Exercise.** Studies show that physical activity helps improve attention and how fast students process information. Exercise leading up to test day can be excellent mental preparation – not to mention fresh air helps clear the head.
- **Have fun.** Encourage your child to do something enjoyable the night before a big test – whether it's playing a board game or riding bikes together as a family. Having fun is a helpful distraction from stress.
- **Write it out.** Writing about test stress can be a great way to conquer it. The idea is to get rid of stress by putting it all down on paper. Suggest your child write for 5-10 minutes about test stress. It can be an empowering way to frame positive thoughts about accomplishments as well, such as "I do a good job on math facts homework" or "I did a really good job on the ELA practice test."
- **Think positive thoughts.** Science shows that thinking positive thoughts can actually help the brain function. Help your child practice this: When you start to feel stressed, take slow, deep breaths and think of something that makes you happy – petting your dog, playing a game with friends, hanging out at the beach in summer – for 10-20 seconds. Remind children that they can use this same technique in the middle of the test if they feel stressed. Taking 20 seconds to relax can help regain focus.
- **Do the best you can.** That's all that is expected of students – to do the best they can on a test. Let your child know there may be questions they don't know the answer to or don't understand. Suggest they skip these questions and move on, coming back later when they can perhaps spend a little more time.

*The bottom line is that taking any test can be stressful, invigorating or scary. But with the right approach, children can feel they are mentally and physically ready to handle the challenge.*

### Opting out doesn't help anyone.

Despite what you may have heard, neither New York State law nor the education commissioner's regulations provide any legal right or mechanism for students – or districts – to opt out of required state

assessments, except for certain exceptions such as those involving students with disabilities.

The state assessments, along with the annual report card for your school district, help parents and teachers know—from one objective view—how well students' achievement measures up to the Common Core Learning Standards.

The test scores also help determine what additional academic help any individual student may need to reach the expectations for his or her grade level.

Districts may not make "Adequate Yearly Progress" (AYP) in the state's accountability system and could lose federal Title I funding if participation in the tests falls below 95 percent.

# Getting to the core



## of Common Core Learning Standards



“Every time a college freshman takes a placement exam that first month on campus, he or she is being

tested against the very expectations in the Common Core.

“Every time a high school graduate faces a daunting task on a challenging job (from the welder applying knowledge of fractions to the electrician reading the National Electrical Code), he or she is being tested against the Common Core. And quite frankly, our students are not doing well enough on those real-world tests. Only about 35 percent of our students graduate with the skills and knowledge necessary to be called college- and career-ready.”

John B. King Jr.  
NYS Education Commissioner

New York State’s Education Department has created a website ([www.engageny.org](http://www.engageny.org)) where parents can find more information about Common Core and how it will help prepare students for a successful future.

The Common Core State Standards are important because they will help all children – no matter who they are – learn the same skills. They create clear expectations for what your child should know and be able to do in key areas: **reading, writing, speaking and listening, language and mathematics.**

If you understand what these expectations are, then you can work with your child’s teacher and help your child learn.



### What do these changes mean for our children?

The Common Core standards ask teachers and students to dig deeper into the core skills and concepts for each grade level. This means that students will learn much more about fewer topics. It also means that teachers will have more time to cover subjects in greater detail. This gives your child an opportunity to really understand what is being taught. These changes are called Common Core “shifts.”

#### For example:

**In English Language Arts (ELA), pupils will:**

*Read more non-fiction;*

*Learn about the world by reading;*

*Read more challenging material;*

*Talk about reading using evidence gathered from the text;*

*Learn how to write based on what was read;*

*Learn more vocabulary words.*

**In mathematics, students will:**

*Build on learning year after year;*

*Spend more time on fewer concepts (dig deeper for better understanding);*

*Develop speed and accuracy in solving math problems;*

*Understand why math works and be able to prove their understanding;*

*Memorize math facts;*

*Use math in real-world situations.*



### Questions we’ve been asked

#### Q. Will this mean more state tests?

**A.** No. But there will be different, more rigorous tests. And test scores could drop in the first couple of years as students and teachers adjust to the new standards. This doesn’t mean they’ve failed in any way. The tests will help teachers understand where their students need added support to reach the new expectations for their grade level.

#### Q. Will new standards in ELA and math limit my child’s access to other subject areas, such as the arts or career and technical education?

**A.** Common Core will actually help teachers integrate learning across subject areas. This means that students will be given lessons that bring together mathematics, science, social studies, English language arts and other subjects.

#### Q. What about students with disabilities and English language learners?

**A.** There is a clear guide for applying the standards to English language learners and students with disabilities. The standards allow teachers to slow down and cover subjects in greater detail. This will give students a better opportunity to really understand what is being taught.

#### Q. Won’t raising the standards make dropouts more likely?

**A.** There are many factors that can cause a student to drop out of school. However, 7 in 10 young dropouts said they were not motivated or inspired to work hard in high school. Two-thirds of dropouts said they would have worked harder if more was demanded of them.<sup>1</sup>

1 Civic Enterprises. The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts. March 2006. (<http://www.saarnys.org/uploads/content/TheSilentEpidemic-ExecSum.pdf>)