



Homer Central School District

NYS ELA and Mathematics Testing in Grades 3-8 Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Why do students in grades 3-8 have to take an English Language Arts and Mathematics assessment?

A: The federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) requires that state tests be administered in English Language Arts and Mathematics. Additionally, sections 100.3 and 100.4 of the Commissioner's Regulations require all students in public and charter schools take all state assessments at their grade level. Tests are considered part of a "course of study" under a school board's authority and are included as a part of the program requirements for students in grades 3-8.

Q: What is the purpose of 3-8 ELA and Mathematics Common Core tests?

A: The ELA/Literacy and Mathematics Common Core tests are intended to provide students, families, educators, and the public better measures of student proficiency in the knowledge and skills students need to succeed in college and/or careers. The results from these assessments will help you and our schools directly address the learning needs of your child so that he or she gets and/or stays on track for college and career success.

Q: Are parents able to have their children refuse to take the 3-8 NYS assessments?

A: No. There is no provision in statute or regulation that allows parents to have their children refuse to take State tests.

Q: What if parents keep their children home during the testing window?

A: Students would have to be absent for the entire administration period of the assessments. This is up to six days for the ELA and Mathematics assessment window.

Q: Does a district have any obligation to provide alternative activities for children who refuse to take the assessments?

A: No. Test administration is a labor-intensive endeavor. Teachers, teacher assistants, administrators and support staff are all needed to ensure a positive test administration cycle. Testing accommodations for students with special needs require us to use space throughout our buildings for separate locations. Alternative activities within the classroom are distracting for those students who are taking the test, which can result in poorer results for those children. In addition, those students who score in the 1-2 range are required to receive

supplemental support the following year—something which in actuality they may not need, thus diverting limited resources from students who really do need extra support.

Q: How could a student’s refusal to take the assessment affect my school district’s accountability?

A: Any time there is an absence of data there is an impact on district-wide accountability. It can affect a district by:

- Impacting the 95% participation criteria established by the State, which could lead a district to placement on assistance plan or focus list. Students who refuse to take the test will be treated as students without valid scores.
- Altering the Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) calculations for meeting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). AMO is the value that signifies that a group of students is making satisfactory progress toward proficiency in the State’s learning targets. Failing to make AYP leads a school or district to lose Good Standing—the school or district will have to create a Local Assistance Plan. A district may become a Focus or Priority school, giving the State even greater control over our schools.
- AMO is the value, called a Performance Index (PI) that ranges from 0-200 for each accountability group. The Performance Index is calculated by converting student scores (1s, 2s, 3s and 4s) using a formula. Students who receive 3s and 4s are scoring proficient levels. Students who receive 1s or 2s could be on track to proficiency, but are not there yet.

Q: How is a student who does not participate in the assessments counted for accountability and reporting purposes?

A: For accountability and other statewide reporting purposes, students are ultimately reported to the State as “not tested.”

Q: How do schools report a student who takes only part of the assessment?

A: The answer sheets will be scanned as if the student had completed the assessment and left a part of the assessment unanswered. If the multiple choice response section was refused, the scores for that section would be scored as incorrect. If the constructed response section was refused, it would be coded as “no response.”

Q: What is the effect of students refusing to take the assessments on teachers and principals?

A: Teachers of grades 4-8 ELA and Mathematics receive growth scores from the State that are based on student performance on 3-8 Assessments. If a student refuses to take the assessment this year, the student would not have a growth score the next year. This is because it takes two years of consecutive data for the State to generate a student growth score. Invalid scores could lower a teacher’s growth score.

Teachers must have at least 16 valid student scores to receive a growth score. If a teacher doesn't receive the score from the State, they must follow district procedures for setting an SLO (student learning objective). Principals derive their score from the entire grade levels. If there are large numbers of students refusing to take the assessments, this could impact the principal's growth score.

Q: When did we start testing all students in ELA and Mathematics? What is the history?

A: The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) is the most recent iteration of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), the major federal law authorizing federal spending on programs to support K-12 schooling. ESEA was enacted in 1965 as part of the Johnson Administration's War on Poverty campaign. The law's original goal, which remains today, was to improve educational equity for students from lower income families by providing federal funds to school districts serving poor students. Since its initial passage in 1965, ESEA has been reauthorized seven times, most recently in January 2002 as the No Child Left Behind Act. Each reauthorization has brought changes to the program, but its central goal of improving the educational opportunities for children from lower income families remains. The 1994 reauthorization, the *Improving America's Schools Act*, put in place key standards and accountability elements for states and local school districts that receive funding under the law. These accountability provisions were further developed in the most recent reauthorization, the No Child Left Behind Act.

Although NCLB covers numerous federal education programs, the law's requirements for **testing, accountability, and school improvement** receive the most attention. NCLB requires states to test students in reading and mathematics annually in grades 3-8 and once in grades 10-12. States must test students in science once in grades 3-5, 6-8, and 10-12. Individual schools, school districts and states must publicly report test results in the aggregate and for specific student subgroups, including low-income students, students with disabilities, English language learners, and major racial and ethnic groups.

Sources:

Erie 1 BOCES/WNYRIC document: *Ramifications of Refusal of NYS 3-8 ELA and/or Mathematics Assessments and Effects of Not Meeting 95% Participation Rate*

Engage NY - *Letter to Parents* – Commissioner John King

Federal Education Budget Project website (*No Child Left Behind – Overview*)

U.S. Department of Education website (*Elementary and Secondary Education Act*)