

The ABC's of Assessments

What is an assessment?

- An assessment is used to obtain information relative to some known objective or goal. A test is a special form of assessment.
- Students have always been tested and assessed throughout their K-12 schooling via some form of local, state or standardized testing measure.
- High quality tests and assessments benefit students, by providing an objective measure of student progress and program effectiveness.

What tests does NYS require?

Level	Tests
Elementary/ Middle School : 3 rd -8 th grade	ELA and Math annually, 4th and 8th grade Science
High School: 9 th -12 th grade	One Regent Exam in Math, Ela, American History, Global History and Science

Why does the federal government require assessments?

- When the federal government reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 2001, called No Child Left Behind (NCLB), testing of all students in grades 3-8 in reading and math, plus once in high school, became law.
- 95% of all students were required to sit for these assessments and the performance for each subgroup of students must be publicly reported.
- The federal government felt it could hold all states accountable for student achievement through this law; assuring that all students, in every subgroup within a school were given access to high quality education.
- The tests became known as “high stakes” because funding, and other sanctions were directly tied to the performance on just these assessments.

What are Common Core assessments?

- The federal government passed the Race to the Top legislation (RTTT) in 2009 and money was appropriated to the U.S. Department of Education to set up competitive grants for school reform.
- States were allowed to apply for these dollars; however, the money was tied to adopting and implementing the Common Core standards.
- RTTT also required that states develop assessments tied to these standards as well as teacher evaluation plans and the capacity for data collection.
- NY State elected to participate and implemented Common Core standards and the associated assessments needed to comply with the RTTT legislation very shortly after receiving the grant money.

Why are parents refusing to have their children sit for these assessments?

- When NYS received their grant from RTTT, the New York State Department of Education (NYSED), felt that it was important to begin implementation as soon as possible. Work on the new standards, assessments, data collection system and teacher/principal evaluations began immediately.
- School districts however, did not have the time or resources in place to best align curriculum to the standards in meaningful ways.
- When some districts used the NYS modules as curriculum, concerns surfaced that teacher creativity and autonomy were being lost under the new regulations.
- NYSED linked student growth scores on these new assessments to teacher and principal evaluations (APPR). The Governor increased the weight of these assessments on staff evaluations and created a complex scoring matrix which is very difficult to understand, as part of the budget process.
- Concerns over privacy and the reporting of student data through the use of a third party vendor arose.

- There were issues with the tests themselves; they were longer; they had errors, and in some cases were developmentally inappropriate.
- Teachers were held to strict requirements about testing questions and the vendor, Pearson, seemed to be driving policy at the state level, leaving the public with the sense that local control over education was lost.
- These issues were all highly publicized. As a result, a perfect storm was created and Monroe County had an average refusal rate of 38%.

What precipitated the changes that we now see in education both at the state and federal level?

Federal Level

- Many current legislators in Congress were concerned that the federal government had overreached its role in education and wanted to give states back their constitutional authority over education. A bipartisan bill called, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), was drafted which limits the federal role in education. It was passed by both houses and signed by President Obama (Dec. 2015)
- The regulations for annual testing remains and the rest of the ESSA regulations are still in the development stage. Implementation will not occur until 2017-2018.

NY State Level

- Two task forces were developed to respond to the public outcry over the Common Core standards and assessments. The Governor developed a Common Core Task Force and the State Education Department created a commission to review the standards and assessments. Neither was charged to look at the APPR requirements. However, as a result of both studies, recommendations and changes were made to APPR.
- The Common Core Task force issued 20 recommendations which the Governor accepted. They fell into three categories:
 - Establish New High Quality Standards,
 - Develop Better Curriculum Guidance and Resources,
 - Significantly Reduce Testing Time and Preparation and Ensure Tests Fit the Curriculum and Standards.
- **Their final recommendation stated that “until the new system is fully phased in, the results from assessments aligned to the current Common Core standards, as well as the updated standards, shall only be advisory and not used to evaluate the performance of individual teachers and students” until 2020, and has been endorsed by the Board of Regents.**
- It is important to note that, during this transition period, **the legislation driving APPR still exists and has not been modified.**

What are the changes being made to the NY State assessments?

- The state legislature provided funding to make improvements to the testing program (6/2015). This will result in more test questions being released and making test results available more quickly.
- Questar Assessment, will replace Pearson, and be developing NYS assessments for next school year. More NYS teachers will help in the development of these new tests to ensure that they meet grade level standards (10/2015).
- The Commissioner of Education, Mary Ellen Elia has stated that changes already underway include modifications to the standards. Teachers, parents and other stakeholders will be involved to a greater extent in decisions related to standards, assessments and teacher evaluation (12/2015).
- The state tests will be shortened. Students in all grades will read one less passage in ELA and answer fewer questions. In Math, there will fewer multiple choice questions (1/2016).
- Students will be allowed to take the tests, untimed as long as they are “productively working,” which will be determined locally (2/2016).
- The state is still working on making 3-8 state tests available to schools on a computer-based platform.