

# South Orangetown Central School District

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## 2016 3-8 TEST RESULTS & RELATED CONCERNS QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

The following set of *Questions & Answers* that we have developed in an effort to explain the design, administration, results, and changes of the New York State 2016 State Assessments for grades 3-8:

### **1. What are the New York State Grades 3-8 Assessments?**

These assessments were developed by the New York State Education Department to measure annual student progress in reading and math. The New York State ELA assessment will be administered on Tuesday, April 5, Wednesday, April 6, and Thursday, April 7 and the Math assessment will be administered on Wednesday, April 13, Thursday, April 14, and Friday, April 15 for students in grades 3-8.

### **2. How have the grades 3-8 state assessment results changed?**

According to the New York State Education Department in 2015, students **statewide** have made incremental progress in ELA and math since 2013, the first year assessments aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards were administered in grades 3-8. In ELA, the percentage of all test takers in grades 3-8 who scored at the proficient level (Levels 3 and 4) remained consistent in 2015 at 31.3 compared to 30.6 in 2014 and 31.1 in 2013. In math, the percentage of all test takers in grades 3-8 who scored at the proficient level (Levels 3 and 4) increased by seven points in two years to 38.1 in 2015 from 36.2 in 2014 and 31.1 in 2013.

For the first three years of “Common Core aligned” assessments in South Orangetown students performed as follows:

- **2015 SOCSO 3-8 PROFICIENCY LEVELS AVERAGED 47.8% in MATH AND 44.3% in ELA**
- **2014 SOCSO 3-8 PROFICIENCY LEVELS AVERAGED 54% IN MATH AND 42% IN ELA.**
- **2013 SOCSO 3-8 PROFICIENCY LEVELS AVERAGED 43% IN MATH AND 47% IN ELA.**

**Please Note: In 2015, South Orangetown experienced an unprecedented number of student opt-outs which significantly skewed the overall test results.**

### 3. What has changed for 2016?

- Assessments are shorter in length;
- Each ELA and math question has been reviewed and edited by a minimum of 22 New York State teachers for appropriateness;
- Assessments are untimed. This will enable students to complete the assessments and may also reduce student's stress levels;
- These assessment results will no longer be linked to teacher and principal evaluations;
- Test score results will be received earlier than in prior years.

### 4. Why have the scores remained flat?

Even though state officials promised that test scores would rise, they remained flat. Some of this has been attributed to the increased volume of testing, the accelerated implementation of the state's new curriculum and accountability systems, and more than 200,000 student opt-outs statewide in 2015.

According to many school leaders and teachers, **other** factors have contributed to poor test results throughout the state:

- In the past the state had provided teachers with all exam questions so that they could help students understand the kinds of assessment tasks that they would be expected to see on the exams. It was not until after the second year of assessments and tremendous parental pressure that the state agreed to release 50% of test items.
  - For 2016, at least 75% of items will be released to the public.
  - The tests were extremely long – many students were unable to finish. In New York State, almost 200,000 students opted out of the assessments while many “passively” opted out by not completing the tests.
  - For 2016, the tests are shorter and untimed.
- Some of the material was not developmentally appropriate for students who have not reached certain levels of cognitive maturation.
  - At least 22 NYS teachers have reviewed each question on the 2016 ELA and Math State Assessments.

**5. When will parents receive the test results?**

It is anticipated that the district will send home the individual N.Y. State assessment reports in late August or early September by mail, dependent upon the NYS Education Department timeline.

**6. How do I talk to my child about his or her scores?**

It is extremely important that parent and teachers emphasize to children that these assessments and results are one small piece of demonstrating their abilities or what they know and that they will not be used for any decisions regarding placement.

**7. How are these assessments a predictor of college and career readiness?**

The tagline of “college and career readiness” has become the mantra for the national reform movement. It is claimed that the new Common Core standards will prepare kindergarteners through high school seniors for college and careers.

There is no evidence to support this claim. The standards are not based on any scientifically-based research study. They were selected via a “committee” and are based on the opinions of those on the committee, not through a thorough analysis and testing to determine that they will produce the results that have been promised.

**8. Will the common core standards and higher U.S. test scores improve the economy?**

While the United States has never performed well on international assessments going back over 60 years, our country has led in almost every leading economic indicator within the same time period\*. This continues today.

The United States is known for its innovation. One piece of evidence is the annual number of approved patents for innovation. In 2011, the United States was granted almost 110,000 patents. All other nations combined were granted almost 116,000. The second leading patent generator was Japan with 46,000. Such creativity and innovation do not come without a sound and productive public education system.

The U.S. gross domestic product (GDP) is 3x that of China’s and 5x that of Germany’s and just slightly below the collective nations of the European Union, even though many of these countries have students who perform better on tests.

There is not nor has there been any correlation between performance on international scholastic tests and economic success. Perhaps one of the reasons that our economy has

been so successful has been that schools, under local control, have adapted to the needs of society based on the expertise of local educators and community members.

Some education experts see the comprehensive curriculum, not one narrowly focused on test prep, as a reason for economic success. Many are concerned that over-standardization in order to be competitive on international tests may in fact be counterproductive. There are some who believe that this may not only be an expensive experiment in public education reform but a dangerous one.

{\*The United States has one of the highest child poverty rates in the developed world with around 22% of children living below the poverty level. New York State’s childhood poverty level is comparable to that of the nation and according to 2010 statistics New York ranked 28 of 50 in this category. It is also no surprise that in states with the lowest child poverty levels (e.g., Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Maryland), performance on exams or high school graduation rates are consistently the highest}.

### **Links and Resources**

We’ve attached the following links from EngageNy to help parents understand the parent reports generated by the New York State Education Department and to view the 50% of questions and answers recently released by the department.

[Understanding the 2015 Grades 3–8 Common Core Mathematics Score Reports](#)

[Released 2015 3-8 ELA and Mathematics State Test Questions](#)

[Frequently Asked Questions: 3-8 Testing Program](#)

[Fact Sheet – Common Core and Assessments](#)