



THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT / THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK

Commissioner of Education
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August 7, 2013

Dear Superintendent:

This week, we are releasing the results of the April 2013 grades 3-8 math and English Language Arts (ELA) assessments. This year's state assessments are the first for New York students to measure the Common Core Learning Standards that were adopted by the State Board of Regents in 2010. As expected, the percentage of students deemed proficient will be significantly lower than in 2011-12. This change in scores -- which will effectively create a new baseline measurement of student learning -- is largely the result of the shift in the assessments to measure the Common Core Standards, which more accurately reflect students' progress toward college and career readiness. As I have said in a recent memo to each of you, these new proficiency rates do not mean that teachers are teaching less or that students are learning less.

These results provide an important leadership moment for all of us in New York State and for you in your district specifically. You have the power to leverage these results and focus everyone's attention where it belongs - on fully implementing the Common Core in the schools in your community this fall. While there are observers who will mischaracterize these results as a poor reflection on you, your principals, your teachers, and your students, it is essential that we together instead frame this moment as an opportunity to orient our work towards a new target -- the readiness of each of our students to succeed in college or career when they leave your hallways. To maintain this focus, we've made sure the scores will not negatively impact teacher, principal or school accountability. No new districts will be identified as Focus Districts and no new schools will be identified as Priority schools based on 2012-13 assessment results. The student growth scores used in teacher and principal evaluation result in similar proportions of educators earning each rating category (Highly Effective, etc.) for student growth in 2012-13 as 2011-12 because these scores are based on year-to-year comparisons for similar students.¹ Similarly, at the July 2013 meeting, the Board of Regents asked that we review the requirements for Academic Intervention Services to ensure that we consider student need and district impact when setting policy for the year ahead.

The new assessments are a much better, more accurate tool for educators, students, and parents as we work together to address the rigorous demands of the Common Core and college and career readiness in the 21st century. The results are consistent with other indicators of the college and career readiness of New York State students, including the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), NYS student performance on the SAT and PSAT, and college and career ready scores on New York State's high school Regents exams. As you know, these results do not surprise us. They tell us that we have much work to do to close the gap between our students' current knowledge and skills and true college and career readiness.

¹ State provided growth scores for educators will be sent to districts during the week of August 19, 2013.

I have been in many of your districts, your schools and your classrooms with you and know that you are ready for this challenge. I am heartened by the work I see, by what your teacher and principal ambassadors and your regional teams are doing at Network Team Training, and by the increasing collaboration on this work that I see happening across the state. I am impressed by the conversations that you are having with your boards about the demands of the Common Core and how to best move it forward. I encourage you to maintain this focus and to not let these scores, as sobering as they may be for you and your community, to distract you from the task at hand. Instead, we must be energized by this opportunity. To be clear, the results we've announced today are not a critique of past efforts; they're a new starting point on a roadmap to future success. Your voice will be extremely important as we support parents, students, teachers, and principals in taking our next important steps forward. You have the positional and relational authority to move your community to the next chapter in our important work.

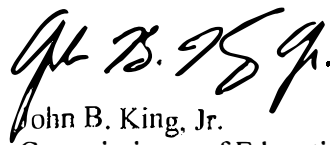
My team and I stand ready to continue to provide you with the tools, resources and training to assist you in your work and that's why we've been building strong supports on www.EngageNY.org. Among those are:

- A [Parent Toolkit](#) to help you communicate with parents about the Common Core and why NYS has chosen to move in this direction including a [letter to parents](#) from Commissioner King on the score release that we ask for you to distribute to all families in your district;
- The [TriState rubric](#) for evaluating curriculum materials against the Common Core;
- Build-your-own-institute materials for the professional development of [teachers](#) and [principals](#);
- A [video series](#) on the instructional Shifts demanded by the Common Core;
- [Videos of Common Core instruction](#) from across New York State;
- A [Video of a speech](#) I recently made on the standards and their importance;
- [Curriculum modules](#);
- [Tools for collecting evidence of the shifts in practice](#);
- [Assessment design materials](#) (which will include approximately 25% of the Spring 2013 test questions with annotations later this week); and
- A [set of expectations and metrics](#) for the work of teachers, principals, superintendents, Network Teams, and District Superintendents.

Please make sure you visit the site often. New resources and videos are added almost daily.

We all share the same goal: to make sure all students in New York have the skills and knowledge to be successful in college and careers. With the Common Core, we're building a ladder toward that goal; the assessment scores are a measure of where our students are on that ladder and give us a clearer, more accurate picture of the climb ahead. Thank you for your leadership. Thank you for your partnership. It is an honor to do this work beside you.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of John B. King, Jr. in black ink, appearing as 'John B. King, Jr.' with a stylized flourish.

John B. King, Jr.
Commissioner of Education