



Assistant Commissioner
Office of State Assessment

March 2021

TO: District Superintendents
Superintendents of Schools
Principals of Public, Religious, and Independent Schools
Leaders of Charter Schools

FROM: Steven E. Katz *Steven E. Katz*

SUBJECT: Spring 2021 Grades 3–8 English Language Arts and Mathematics Tests

This memorandum provides you with essential information regarding the Spring 2021 Grades 3–8 English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics Tests. Please also see the note regarding the Spring 2021 Grades 4 and 8 Science Tests on page 6.

The New York State Education Department (NYSED) and the Board of Regents continue to make our primary focus the physical and mental health, safety, and well-being of the children and adults in our schools. NYSED and the Board of Regents have been closely monitoring the feasibility and fairness of administering the Grades 3–8 ELA and Mathematics Tests this spring. On February 12, 2021, NYSED submitted a formal request to the United States Department of Education (USDE) to waive state testing requirements at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. Pending a decision from the USDE regarding NYSED’s waiver request, we are sharing the following information as a means to prepare to proceed with the Spring 2021 test administrations.

The Department has determined that it will not be possible to administer any of this year’s State assessments remotely and, if they occur, assessments will be “school-based” and “in-person.” However, being mindful of the variability in the manner that instruction is being provided to students across the State in response to COVID-19, NYSED is providing schools much more flexibility than had been necessary in past years in the local in-school scheduling of the Spring 2021 operational tests.

If the assessment waiver request is not granted by USDE, for the Spring 2021, administration schools will be required to administer only Session 1 of the ELA and Mathematics Tests to students. Only student scores on the Session 1 test questions will contribute to students’ total scores for the tests. Session 2 will be made available to schools strictly for their optional administration to students and, if administered, student scores for Session 2 test questions will be used for local student assessment purposes only. In addition, the Spring 2021 Session 1 tests have been reduced in length by the removal of the embedded multiple-choice field test questions. Schools that selected computer-based testing and elect to administer the optional Session 2 will be able to do so within the established testing and scoring windows using Questar Assessment, Inc.’s (Questar’s) Nextera online test administration system and ScorePoint online scoring system.

The [2020-21 Elementary- and Intermediate-Level Testing Schedule](#), posted on the Department’s website, has been amended to reflect that schools may use the entire testing window, Monday, April 19 –Thursday, April 29 for ELA and Monday, May 3 – Friday, May 14 for Mathematics, to

administer the tests to students, whether the testing is paper based or computer based. Additional flexibility that will be available to schools for the Spring 2021 administration of these tests is as follows:

- Schools are not expected to bring students into the building to participate in the tests if the students are receiving entirely remote instruction during the testing windows. However, to assist in scheduling, NYSED suggests that schools consider contacting parents of students receiving entirely remote instruction to advise them of the testing schedule and ascertain the parent's interest in having their child come to school to participate in the test. Schools that are entirely remote during the entire testing window are not expected to re-open for the sole purpose of administering the tests.
- For students who are unable to participate in the test (Session 1) due to receiving entirely remote instruction during the entire testing window, schools will report this by marking the field "receiving entirely remote instruction" on the student's answer sheet or in the Nextera computer-based testing (CBT) system.
- Schools will have the option to administer the tests to students over the full duration of the testing window to accommodate instructional schedules.
- Schools will be allowed to administer the tests to students who are receiving hybrid instruction on the days that they are ordinarily attending school in person. Schools will not be required to test the entire grade on the same school day.
- Public school districts are not required to have a uniform testing schedule for all of the schools in the district.
- Make-up testing at each school for students who are absent on the day of their test may begin on the school day immediately following the first day of the test administration.
- The operational test will not include any embedded field test questions. As a result, there will only be one form administered per grade and subject and all questions in Session 1 will contribute to student scores.

GENERAL INFORMATION

[The 2021 Grades 3–8 English Language Arts and Mathematics Tests School Administrator's Manual](#) provides information needed for the administration of the ELA and Mathematics Tests and is only available on the Department's website. If you have questions about any information appearing in this memorandum or the manual, you may call 518-474-8220 or 518-474-5902 or send an email to emscassessinfo@nysed.gov for assistance. The *School Administrator's Manual* contains the *Deputy and Proctor Certificate* and the *Test Storage Certificate*. These certificates must be completed and signed, as applicable to each form, by the principal and by all persons who serve as proctors for the required Session 1 of the tests. The *Deputy and Proctor Certificate* and the *Test Storage Certificate* must be retained in the school's files for one year.

DELIVERY OF TEST AND SCORING MATERIALS

Test materials will be sent to schools by the Department's contractor, Questar, and will be delivered by United Parcel Service (UPS). See Attachment A on page 7 of this memo for delivery dates. UPS deliveries may occur at any time between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. Schools that do not receive their shipments of test materials by 12:00 noon on the last dates indicated in Attachment A should contact Questar at 866-997-0695. Please note that the Arabic, Bengali, and Chinese (Simplified)

alternate language editions of the Mathematics Tests will be sent to schools by NYSED, for those schools that have requested any of these alternate language editions.

All schools administering the paper-based Grades 3–8 ELA and Mathematics Tests must have made arrangements to receive their answer sheets and scanning services from a Regional Information Center (RIC) or large-city scanning center. RICs are data processing centers operated by twelve BOCES that provide answer sheets and scanning services for all schools outside the five large-city school districts. The RICs will also provide data to the Student Information Repository System (SIRS) for participating schools. Participation in the Grades 3–8 testing program and the Repository will allow all schools access to reports for their school. More information about the [repository system](#) is available on the Department's website. Answer sheets will be shipped directly to schools from the RIC or large-city scanning center. (The Department does not ship answer sheets to any schools.)

CHECKING THE SHIPMENT OF TEST MATERIALS

As soon as each shipment containing test materials as well as optional Session 2 scoring materials arrives at your school or approved storage location, conduct an inventory to verify that you have received all materials indicated on the shipping notice. **Do not open shrink-wrapped packages of secure test materials during the inventory until the first day on which that part of the test will first be administered in your school.** You must store the test materials including those for the optional Session 2 in a safe or vault, except while they are being inventoried or administered to students.

Please note that large type, braille, and alternative language editions are often shipped to schools in separate cartons or padded mailers and may not be delivered at the same time as regular editions. Braille editions of ELA test booklets may be delivered later than the delivery dates indicated in Attachment A.

- If your school receives its shipment but an item or items that are listed on the shipping notice are missing, please contact Questar at 866-997-0695.
- If your school requires items that were not originally requested, including any unexpected need for test materials for students with accommodations, please contact Questar via e-mail at ny.3-8.help@questarai.com. Questar will determine whether the regional center has the materials necessary to satisfy the additional request. After contacting Questar, the school should contact the official in charge of the regional center to arrange pickup of test materials.
- The official school representative picking up secure test materials must present to the regional center official a photo ID and a printed letter of authorization signed by the principal listing the materials to be picked up. This letter, authorizing the school representative to pick up test materials, must include the school's letterhead.
- The school representative must countersign the authorization letter and leave it with the regional center official before the emergency supply of materials can be released.
- [Information](#) on regional centers is available at the Office of State Assessment's website.

SECURITY OF THE GRADES ELA 3-8 AND MATHEMATICS TESTS BEFORE TESTING

The principal of each school ordering tests is responsible for making the necessary arrangements to safeguard all test materials by taking the following actions:

- Place all test booklets and scoring CDs in a safe or vault as soon as they arrive at the storage site.
- Distribute only the nonsecure Teacher's Directions to proctors as soon as is practical after the shipment arrives.
- Ensure that no one opens the shrink-wrapped packages of secure test materials prior to the first day that each part of the test is scheduled to be administered in the school.
- Open the packages of test booklets just early enough to permit distribution of materials for each session being administered.

- Check the safe or vault daily to ensure that the test materials stored there have not been tampered with and remain secure.
- Safeguard the combination or key to the safe or vault to preclude access to the test materials by unauthorized persons.
- Keep all scoring materials under lock and key in a secure location (except when being used for scoring).
- Keep all shrink-wrapped packages of the optional Session 2 test booklets in the safe or vault for the full duration of the testing window if the school is choosing not to administer this optional session to students.

SCHEDULING OF TEST SESSIONS AND SUPERVISION OF STUDENTS DURING TESTING

It is recommended that schools schedule the test session either at the start of the school day or immediately after lunch so that most students will have a sufficient block of time to complete the test session. It is further recommended that schools schedule together for testing those students who are expected to require more time to complete the test session than the pre-lunch or post-lunch block of time provides. Schools should arrange for such students to have a carefully supervised lunch break during any of the test sessions if necessary.

Secure test materials should be collected from the students prior to the start of the lunch break and returned following the supervised lunch break to those who had not completed the test. The school may permit these students to talk with each other and with the supervising adults during the lunch break, but the students must be instructed that they may not discuss the test content during the lunch break. So that their tests will not have to be invalidated, the proctor should not allow any students to resume work on the test session who during the lunch break violated the instruction not to discuss the test content.

TEST READ

For the 2021 Grades 3–8 ELA Tests, students with disabilities whose IEPs or 504 Plans specify this accommodation must have tests read to them in accordance with the testing conditions and implementation recommendations specified on the student’s IEP or 504 Plan. When a test is read to a student with a disability, the test should be read in its entirety, which includes directions, passages, test items, questions, and answer choices. The test must be read in a neutral manner, without intonation or emphasis, and without otherwise drawing attention to key words or phrases. Passages and questions must be read word for word, without any clarification or explanation. Unless the IEP or 504 Plan indicates otherwise, passages, parts of passages, questions, and answer choices may be reread to the student upon the student’s request.

Testing accommodations in students’ IEPs or 504 Plans that are reading-related—for example, reading the test to the student—are permitted for the 2021 Grades 3–8 Mathematics Tests. Unless the IEP or 504 Plan specifically disallows it, when a mathematics test question is read to a student who has this accommodation, all numbers and mathematics symbols, along with words, should be spoken by the teacher to the student. For example, the symbol $<$ should be read as “less than,” and 1,211 should be read as “one thousand, two hundred, eleven.” However, test questions may never be modified or simplified, nor may teachers provide additional examples.

For CBT students, either a human reader or the online text-to-speech accommodation may be used.

USE OF COMMUNICATIONS DEVICES

All students are prohibited from bringing cell phones and certain other personal electronic devices, as defined in the script included in Step 6 of the *Teacher’s Directions*, into a classroom or other location where a State test is being administered. Test proctors and school officials shall retain the

right to collect and hold any prohibited electronic devices prior to the start of the test administration. Admission to the test shall be denied to any student who is in possession of a cell phone or other prohibited electronic device and refuses to relinquish it.

Some students with disabilities may use certain recording/playback devices **only** if this accommodation is specifically required as a provision of the student's IEP or 504 Plan. In addition, a student may be allowed to retain an otherwise prohibited device in their possession if there is documentation on file at the school from a medical practitioner that the student requires such a device during testing. Without such documentation, the general policy on communications devices as provided in the [2021 Grades 3-8 English Language Arts and Mathematics Tests School Administrator's Manual](#) is in effect, and the school may not allow the student to retain any such equipment while testing.

SCRATCH PAPER FOR THE CBT TESTS

Schools that will be administering the ELA and Mathematics Tests on the computer should prepare to furnish scratch paper to their students for use when taking the tests. At the start of each test session the proctor should hand out scratch paper to each student testing with CBT. For the Grades 3–8 ELA Tests, each student should be given one sheet of lined paper, such as loose leaf. For the Grades 3-8 Mathematics Tests, each student should be given two sheets of scratch paper: one sheet of lined or plain paper and one sheet of graph paper. In addition, for all test sessions the proctor should have a further supply of scratch paper on hand to provide to students who request additional sheets during the test session. Students testing with CBT should also be advised that any work done on this scratch paper will not be counted. The scratch paper distributed to students testing with CBT must be collected at the end of the session, whether used or unused, and securely destroyed by the school.

SCORING MATERIALS FOR THE GRADES 3–8 ELA AND MATHEMATICS TESTS

A scoring CD will be sent to schools for each of these tests. The CD will contain PDF files of the scoring materials. If a school elects to administer Session 2 of the Spring 2021 tests for local purposes only, schools must print enough copies of the scoring materials to supply one to each scorer.

ADMINISTRATION AND SCORING OF THE OPTIONAL SESSION 2

If testing with CBT, the school will be able to administer the optional Session 2 to students for local purposes only on the date(s) of the school's choosing within the entire testing window. If administering the optional Session 2, the school will need to have the students' responses to the Session 2 constructed-response questions scored by its specified local scoring consortia during the scoring window shown in the [2020-21 Elementary- and Intermediate-Level Testing Schedule](#). If testing with printed test booklets, the school may administer the optional Session 2 test booklets for local purposes only on the date(s) of the school's choosing within the entire testing window or may retain these printed test booklets to administer to students at a later date.

SECURITY OF THE GRADES 3–8 ELA AND MATHEMATICS TESTS FOLLOWING TESTING

The 2021 Grades 3–8 ELA and Mathematics Tests do not include embedded field test questions. Therefore, unused ELA Test Session 1 and Test Session 2 booklets and unused Mathematics Test Session 1 and Test Session 2 booklets may be retained by the school and used for instructional or staff development purposes after the test administration window has closed.

No used or unused 2021 Grades 3–8 ELA and Mathematics Test materials need to be returned to Questar. Used ELA and Mathematics Test Session 1 booklets may be stored securely in the school for one year, or securely destroyed upon completion of the test administration and scoring. All used answer sheets must be stored securely for a minimum of one year and then securely destroyed. If a school elects to administer the optional Session 2 of the Spring 2021 tests for local purposes only, the school should securely store used Session 2 booklets as well.

Destruction of Secure Test Materials for the 2021 Grades 3–8 ELA and Mathematics Tests

Securely Destroy Upon Completion of Test Administration (for CBT only)	Store Securely in School or District for One Year, then Securely Destroy
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All used scratch paper• Student login credentials, session access codes, and Proctor PINs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All used printed ELA Test Session 2 booklets• All used printed Mathematics Test Session 2 booklets• All used printed answer sheets after their return from the scanning center

CONTACT INFORMATION

For questions regarding test administration policies and procedures, please email emscassessinfo@nysed.gov.

NOTE ON THE SPRING 2021 GRADES 4 AND 8 SCIENCE TESTS

You will receive a separate memorandum providing information concerning the procedures for administering the Spring 2021 Grades 4 and 8 Science Tests. In recognition of the variability in the manner that instruction is being provided to students across the State in response to COVID-19, the Spring 2021 Grades 4 and 8 Science Tests will be comprised of the single-session Written Tests only. There will not be a Performance Test component to these tests this school year.

Attachment A

SHIPMENT AND CHECKING OF THE 2021 ELA AND MATHEMATICS TEST MATERIALS

Contents	Sender	Delivery Dates
<u>Secure</u> Grades 3–8 ELA Regular, Test Read, Braille, and Large-Type Edition Test Session 1 and 2 Booklets; Nonsecure Teacher’s Directions	Questar	April 12 – April 14
<u>Secure</u> Grades 3–8 ELA Scoring CD containing PDF files of the scoring materials for schools	Questar	April 20
<u>Secure</u> Grades 3–8 Mathematics Regular, Test Read, Braille, Large-Type, and Chinese (Traditional), Haitian-Creole, Korean, Russian and Spanish Language Edition Test Session 1 and 2 Booklets; Nonsecure Teacher’s Directions	Questar	April 26–April 28
<u>Secure</u> Grades 3–8 Mathematics Arabic, Bengali, and Chinese (Simplified) Language Edition Test Session 1 and 2 Booklets	NYSED	April 26–April 28
<u>Secure</u> Grades 3–8 Mathematics Scoring CD containing PDF files of the scoring materials for schools	Questar	May 4

Schools that do not receive their Grades 3–8 ELA test booklets and teacher’s directions by noon on April 14 or their Grades 3–8 Mathematics test booklets and teacher’s directions by noon on April 28 should contact Questar at 866-997-0695.