

PLAINVIEW-OLD BETHPAGE CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT
106 Washington Avenue, Plainview, New York 11803



March 2014

Dear Parents,

In the next few weeks, our district will begin the administration of the NYS 3-8 English Language Arts and mathematics assessments. Our teachers have been preparing the students for these exams since the school year began with a comprehensive curriculum aligned to the Common Core State Standards.

As you may already know, these exams have changed over the past few years. The State Education Department elevated the cut scores to determine proficiency and significantly increased the number of performance indicators assessed. For the second year, our exams will be newly aligned to the adoption of the Common Core Learning Standards along with deeper coverage of the remaining New York State Standards in order to assure our children achieve college and career readiness.

Please be advised that in accordance with federal requirements and the Commissioner of Education's regulations, the New York State Education Department requires that all students attending grades 3-8 in public schools take all State assessments administered for their grade level.

The schedule of State Assessments in grades 3-8 is as follows:

Test	Administration Dates
Grades 3-8 English Language Arts	Tuesday April 1-Thursday, April 3
Grades 3-8 Mathematics	Wednesday, April 30 – Friday, May 2
Grade 4 Science Performance Test	Wednesday, May 21 – Friday, May 30
Grade 8 Science Performance Test	Wednesday, May 21 – Friday, May 30
Grade 4 Science Written	Monday, June 2
Grade 8 Science Written	Monday, June 2

Although these tests are important, we recognize that they are not the sole indicator of success. Conversations with your child about his/her best, as always, would suffice. Upon receiving the results which has typically been in late summer, we will send home a detailed report outlining the areas tested and scores received. We are attaching a guide to the Common Core and tips to assist your child in preparing for these exams.

If you have any questions, please direct them to your child's teacher or the building principal. If either one of us can be of assistance, please call the number listed below.

Sincerely,

Lorna R. Lewis

Lorna R. Lewis
Superintendent of Schools

Jill M. Gierasch

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Assistant Superintendent for
Curriculum and Instruction

Getting to the Core

of Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS)



Have You Heard?

Beginning in 2016, the SAT will be redesigned to be more closely aligned to the CCLS. College Board recently unveiled plans which include making the new SAT exams more "focused" and "useful". This includes an emphasis on having students justify their answers with textual evidence, shunning "obscure" SAT words, and covering fewer math topics but in greater depth. This plan is promising as this is similar to the work we are doing with our elementary and middle school students at the appropriate instructional level.

Did You Know?

At the start of first grade, most students have about 6,000 words in their spoken vocabulary. Students should be learning approximately 3000 more words each year through the third grade. Fortunately, the district and teachers have spent quite a bit of time analyzing the expectations on the CCLS and have recognized the need for purposeful academic vocabulary instruction. Students will be exposed to tiered vocabulary words from the most basic to high frequency, content specific vocabulary learned in the various subjects. Explicit teaching of these words continues through grade 8 and into the high school.

The Common Core State Standards are important because they will help all children - no matter who they are - learn the skills and concepts required at each group level. They create clear expectations for what your child should know and be able to do in key areas: **reading, writing, speaking and listening, language and mathematics**. Please continue to join our many parent workshops either at the building-level or district-wide to help your child learn.

What do these changes mean for our children?

The Common Core standards ask teachers and students to dig deeper into the core skills and concepts for each grade level. This means that students will learn much more about fewer topics. It also means that teachers will have more time to cover subjects in greater detail. This gives your child an opportunity to really understand what is being taught. These changes are called Common Core "shifts."

Common Core Shifts

In English Language Arts (ELA), pupils will:

- Read more non-fiction;*
- Learn about the world by reading*
- Read more challenging material;*
- Talk about reading using evidence gathered from the text;*
- Learn how to write based on what was read;*
- Learn more vocabulary words*

In mathematics students will:

- Build on learning year after year;*
- Spend more time on fewer concepts (dig deeper for better understanding);*
- Develop speed and accuracy in solving math problems;*
- Understand why math works and be able to prove their understanding;*
- Memorize math facts;*
- Use math in real-world situations.*

Common Core: Myths vs. Facts

- Myth:** These *Standards* amount to a national curriculum for our schools.
- Fact:** The *Standards* are *not* a curriculum. They are a clear set of goals and expectations for what knowledge and skills will help our students succeed.
- Myth:** Common Core is all about the test.
- Fact:** Common Core is all about mastering skills necessary to be successful in college or in the work force.
- Myth:** The *Standards* tell teachers what to teach.
- Fact:** These standards establish what students need to learn, but will *not* dictate how teachers should teach. Schools and teachers will decide how best to help students reach the standards.
- Myth:** The *Standards* are not research or evidence-based.
- Fact:** The *Standards* are based on research on what skills are required for students entering college and workforce training programs.

Be Informed and Partner with Us to Prepare Your Child for the Upcoming NYS Tests

Common Core & State Tests

ELA/MATH

Beginning in 2013, the state assessments in English Language Arts (ELA) and math for grades 3-8 were based on the shifts in the Common Core Standards.

Please remember that these tests are an important tool to help teachers see where students need extra support to move on to the next grade level.

During the transition to a more rigorous set of standards, a drop in student scores should not be interpreted as failure on the part of your child to learn or for the teacher's capacity to teach. We look at the whole child in determining instructional needs and next steps.

With state standardized tests on the horizon, you can help your child prepare. These tips and techniques will assist in ensuring your child feels comfortable, is well-prepared and can eliminate stress. Listed below are tools that can actually empower your child to confront this challenge and others they will face in school and beyond.

- ❖ **Get enough sleep.** One study showed that students who got eight hours of sleep the night before a test were three times more likely to answer a question correctly than those who didn't. Adequate sleep 8-10 hours per night - helps ensure children have the energy and stamina to make it through the test in top form.
- ❖ **Eat a healthy breakfast.** Start the day with a meal that includes complex carbohydrates and protein so energy lasts as long as possible. Eggs, cereal and whole-wheat toast give the brain what it needs to help you think more clearly and much longer compared to high-sugar selections. A healthy breakfast can boost memory and help a child be more alert - a definite recipe for test success!
- ❖ **Exercise.** Studies show that physical activity helps improve attention and how fast students process information. Exercise leading up to test day can be excellent mental preparation - not to mention fresh air helps clear the head.
- ❖ **Have fun.** Encourage your child to do something enjoyable the night before a big test - whether it's playing a board game or riding bikes together as a family. Having fun is a helpful distraction from stress.
- ❖ **Write it out.** Writing about stress can be a great way to conquer it. The idea is to get rid of stress by putting it all down on paper. Suggest your child write for 5-10 minutes about test stress. It can be an empowering way to frame positive thoughts about accomplishments as well, such as "I do a good job on math facts homework" or "I did a really good job on my ELA assignment."
- ❖ **Think positive thoughts.** Science shows that thinking positive thoughts can actually help the brain function. Help your child practice this: When you start to feel stressed, take slow, deep breaths and think of something that makes you happy - petting your dog, playing a game with friends, hanging out at the beach in summer - for 10-20 seconds. Remind children that they can use this same technique in the middle of the tests if they feel stressed. Taking 20 second to relax can help regain focus.
- ❖ **Do the best you can.** That's all that is expected of students - to do the best they can on a test. Let your child know there may be questions they don't know the answer to or don't understand. Suggest they skip these questions and move on, coming back later when they can perhaps spend a little more time.

What do these tests mean?

The state assessments, along with the annual report card for our school district, help parents and teachers know - from one objective view - how well students' achievement measures up to the Common Core Learning Standards.

The test scores also help determine what additional academic help any individual student may need to reach the expectations for his or her grade level.

Despite what you may have heard, neither New York State law nor the education commissioner's regulations provide any legal right or mechanism for students - or districts - to opt out of required state assessments. However, the State Education Department in its recently released School Administrator's Manual acknowledges that some students may choose not to participate in a State test. Your building principal should be contacted if you have questions about your child's participation in these assessments.