

ELEMENTARY edition

A PUBLICATION FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PARENTS



Students in Grades 3-6 face new state testing

Help your children succeed with these tests

Beginning this school year, children in grades 3, 5 and 6 will take new state tests in math and English language arts. Similar exams have been in place for fourth graders for several years. The expanded testing in English language arts (covering reading, writing and listening skills) and math for each of the upper elementary grades is designed to show whether children have a firm grasp on the skills they'll need to succeed as they move toward junior high, high school and beyond. These tests will also help teachers identify where the curriculum might need to be fine-tuned to better meet students' needs.

Undoubtedly, high school may seem a long way down the road. However, as children move ahead in school, they will be asked to tackle increasingly more challenging coursework. And once they do hit high school, students will need to show they have mastered the learning and skills that the state requires for graduation. Success with their elementary school lessons now will help them achieve these goals later on.

A look at the new state tests

The state tests are designed to reflect the types of information and skills that children are expected to learn at their grade levels. Although students will be given opportunities throughout the year to become familiar with the types of questions included on the tests, the school year will not be spent drilling for these exams.

The English language arts (ELA) tests

The English language arts tests are administered in two

sessions for students in grades 3 and 5 and three sessions in grades 4 and 6. These exams are designed to measure students' abilities in reading, listening and writing. The tests include a variety of questions such as multiple choice, short- and extended-response and editing tasks.

Reading

In the reading section, students read several passages. These may include short stories, folk tales, poetry, excerpts from biographies or other types of informational writing. For each passage, students will answer questions that demonstrate how well they understand what they've read.

Listening

For this portion of the test, students will listen to a passage and then answer questions that demonstrate how well they understand what was heard. The listening section of the tests in grades 3, 4 and 6 contain literary passages similar in content and vocabulary to the materials they read and hear in the classroom each day. The listening section for students in grade 5 contains informational passages.

Writing

In the writing section of the test, children will be asked to make corrections to paragraphs containing errors in capitalization and punctuation (grade 3) or in capitalization, punctuation, grammar and usage (grade 5). Before tackling this editing task on their own during the exam, students will practice an editing task with their teachers (see next column) to make sure they understand

how to complete this part of the test. Students in grades 4 and 6 will answer two extended-response questions, one in the reading section and one in the listening section. Their answers will be evaluated for writing skills, as well as reading comprehension.

Sample editing task (grade 3)

"There are some mistakes in this paragraph in capital letters and punctuation. Let's correct them together."

My red bicycle is my favorite toy. It used to belong to my big sister katie. She gave it to me. I ride it after School each day. I like my bicycle because it is my favorite color. Do you have a favorite toy.

Reading/writing question (grade 4)

After reading *The View from a Hot-Air Balloon* by Ben Sutter, students will answer questions, such as:

Which of these would be another good title for the article?

- A. How to Draw a Map
- B. Making Sense of Maps
- C. States, Countries and Oceans
- D. Airplanes, Balloons and Birds

Explain what the title of the article means. Use details from the article to support your answer.

The mathematics tests

Each of the math tests in grades 3, 5 and 6 is administered in two sessions. Fourth graders will take three sessions of tests. The first session will

include multiple-choice questions only. The second session—as well as the third session in grade four—will consist of short- and extended-response questions.

Here are three sample questions:

Multiple choice (grade 3)

After reviewing a pictograph that shows the number of books read by students in five different classes during the month of January, students will answer the following questions:

- A. Which teacher's class read exactly 20 books?
- B. How many more books would Mr. Johnson's class have to read to make a total of 50 books?

Short answer (grade 5)

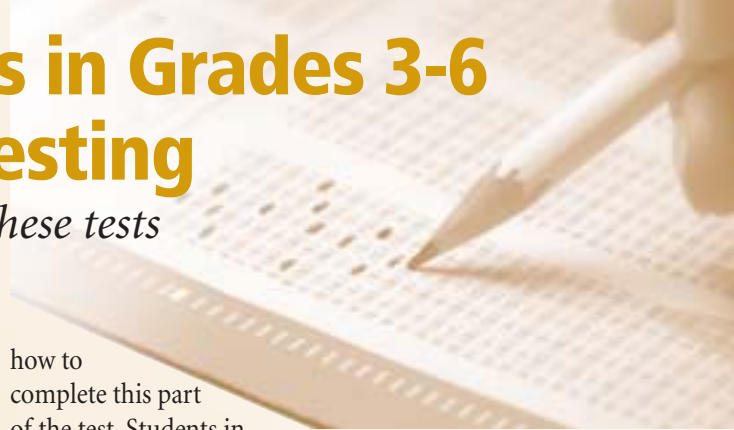
Students will study a line graph that shows a month's worth of recorded times of sunrise in Albany, New York and then answer the following:

- A. At approximately what time did the sun rise on April 17?
- B. On which date did the sun rise at 6:30 a.m.?
- C. Based on the graph, describe the change in the time the sun rises during the first three months of the year.

Short answer (grade 6)

Elissa and Matt bought $\frac{7}{8}$ of a yard of fabric to make a class project. They used only $\frac{1}{3}$ of a yard. How much fabric was left?

Show your work.
Answer: ____ yard



"The Greater Johnstown School District is committed to ensuring that students receive a strong, well-rounded experience by educating the 'whole child,'" said Katherine Sullivan, Assistant Superintendent. "This philosophy is exhibited in the myriad of programming available for Johnstown students."

Preparing students for state tests

With the onset of state testing in grades 3-8, and to further assist in improving instruction, Johnstown School District teachers have participated in related professional development. This experience has allowed staff a deeper understanding of the upcoming assessments, as well as to interpret data, based on actual results. "Having the ability to modify instruction based on actual data will aid teachers in meeting the needs of students, ultimately improving outcomes," said Sullivan. She further explained that the Johnstown School District curriculum is coordinated, consistent, and in compliance with the New York State standards. All students have the benefit of uniformity of textbooks and programming across the district.

Sticking to the curriculum

The state exams assess students' knowledge. "We are sticking to the district curriculum, which is following New York State standards," says Warren Street Elementary Principal Anne Christiano. "We are aligning those standards so that all students possess the skills and knowledge they need at each grade level."

Reading and writing in all areas

"We're not just teaching students how to answer questions. We are teaching them how to solve problems," said Pleasant Avenue Elementary Principal Kathy Dougherty. Now more than ever, she said, state tests are requiring students to

interpret and explain various questions and problems. Reading and writing are key components to explaining answers. The school district is incorporating reading and writing across all subject areas to build these necessary skills. Students working on word problems in math with a focus on writing complete sentences, establishing and writing a thesis or problem statement in science class, or gathering details to support the writing of a Document-Based Question (DBQ) in social studies are examples of this process.

An exciting way to further develop students' reading skills is the use of the Accelerated Reader program, which is available in every elementary school. "Accelerated Reader assists in meeting the state recommendations of having all students read 25 books a year," said Glebe Street Elementary Principal Tim Harris. This is one of the many district initiatives that serves this purpose.

Extra help—before, during or after school

The district offers additional academic support for students who need clarification or extra practice in reading, writing and math. "Whether it's before school, after school, or during recess, the staff across the district is working with small groups of students to ensure success," says Jansen Avenue Elementary Principal Patricia Sotero.

In addition to teachers, certified specialists and



teaching assistants provide extra help for students, in every elementary school, according to Sullivan.

Adding to the day's activities, the Greater Johnstown School District has been awarded a BOCES grant to operate the federally funded 21st Century Community Learning Center After-School Program at Knox Junior High School. The program provides academic assistance, as well as recreational outlets, and is available to sixth, seventh and eighth grade students across the district.

Prior knowledge is power

While the state tests are based on what students learn within the classroom, parents can help students be better prepared at home. "Everything depends on prior knowledge," says Pleasant Avenue fifth-grade teacher, Louise Carville. "It is helpful if parents spend time with their children, read to them, and take them to places of interest." Children learn from experiences, and the more experiences they have, the more they have to build upon when answering a question correctly on the new state tests.

Testing dates for 2005-06

English Language Arts (ELA)

Grades 3, 4, and 5	Tuesday, January 10-Friday, January 13*
Grade 6	Tuesday, January 17-Friday, January 20*

Mathematics

Grades 3, 4 and 5	Tuesday, March 7-Friday, March 10*
Grade 6	Tuesday, March 14-Friday, March 17*

* Students will not be tested for all four of these days. Depending on the grade level, tests run two to three days. This range is given so school districts can stagger tests for different grades throughout the testing week.

What do the test scores mean?

The state exams are graded using a scale of 1-4, with a 4 being the highest score.

Level 4 – Student has exceeded state academic standards

Level 3 – Student has met state academic standards

Level 2 – Student has fallen short of state academic standards and needs help to meet those – expectations.

Level 1 – Student is in academic jeopardy and needs significant remediation/extra help.

Families can expect to learn how their children have done on these tests early in the 2006-07 school year. The state requires that Academic Intervention Services (AIS) be given to students who score at a Level 1 or 2 on the ELA and math exams. These services can include extra instruction during and after school.