

April 3, 2019

Commissioner MaryEllen Elia  
New York State Education Department  
89 Washington Avenue  
Albany, NY 12234

Dear Commissioner Elia,

We are writing to express our concern with the unsuccessful administration of the Grades 3-8 English Language Arts (ELA) assessment April 2<sup>nd</sup> and to recommend potential remedial actions the Department may take in the immediate future.

We recognize that the State has made a number of efforts to improve the quality and reduce the disruption caused by State assessments of students in Grades 3-8. We are appreciative of those efforts and look forward to any additional future steps in that direction.

Syosset also recognizes that the State is moving to eliminate paper testing altogether in 2020. Accordingly, we have participated in field tests of computer-based testing to familiarize ourselves and test our infrastructure. Rather than move to computer-based tests for both Math and ELA simultaneously in 2020, we opted to administer ELA online in 2019. Based on the field tests, it was apparent that the online Math test falls significantly short of the paper-based test for assessing students' math skills, and we hope that the additional time will allow NYSED to continue to improve that assessment. Like you, we anticipated that Questar's corrective action plan and assurances to the State would have remedied last year's technical difficulties for the Spring 2019 cycle.

The purpose of this correspondence is not to criticize the Department for the failure of the vendor's corrective actions, but rather to advocate for next steps that mitigate the impact on students and lost instructional time.

The inability to correctly submit completed exams meant that students experienced lengthier testing periods than they might have otherwise, compounded by the worry that their work might be lost or have to be repeated. Testing is already stressful for young children under the best of circumstances, we do not see any advantage in asking students to retake any portion of the test that was not successfully scored by the vendor:

- The statewide results will already be compromised by this testing irregularity;
- Both at Syosset and statewide, the participation will likely fall well below 95% so there will be no advantage to retesting, since the results will represent a sampling in any event;
- Students will be unlikely to treat the test comparably if they are required to retake it.

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In addition, we think there is a significant potential for parents whose students attempted unsuccessfully to submit Session 1 will choose to “opt-out” their students for Session 2. It is too late for the State to print paper-based tests for the remaining administration of the 2019 testing cycle, so our focus must be on minimizing both the disruption to instruction and the impact on students. Accordingly, we recommend the following actions to mitigate the impact on our student population, and end the current testing cycle with as little further disruption as possible:

- No student with an incomplete score for Session 1 should be expected to retake Session 1 or to take Session 2.
- Similarly, no student with an incomplete score should be recorded as a “Level 1” in the final results, as would currently be the case.
- The State should not rely on the results from this compromised administration for any accountability consequences under ESSA.

The developments on April 2<sup>nd</sup> are unfortunate and our purpose in writing is not to cast blame, but to advocate for solutions that are fair to our students and staff so that we can maintain our instructional momentum. Additionally, by lowering the stakes for students and schools, the Department can focus its attention on addressing the issues with the vendor.

Thank you in advance for your kind consideration.

For the Board of Education,



Dr. Thomas Rogers  
Superintendent of Schools