

To the Editor:

This month, students across the State will take the New York State Grade 3-8 English Language Arts and Mathematics Tests. This year's tests will look different than those from recent years.

The 2016 tests have fewer questions. They also have no time pressure so students who need more time to show us what they know can have it. Every item on the tests has been reviewed by at least 22 New York State educators. We wanted to make sure the questions measure what is being taught in our classrooms.

Additionally, student performance on the 2016 tests will have no consequence on teacher and principal evaluations. For the next four years, no teachers or principals in New York State public schools will be penalized because of how their students did on the Grades 3-8 State tests.

These steps are just a start, and our tests will continue to get better. Future tests will have even greater teacher involvement, and test results will be available earlier than ever before.

But opting out of the 2016 tests is not the answer—tests are an essential part of the student experience. They help educators plan for the coming school year and develop individualized learning plans for students. The tests are the only objective measure we have to compare student progress between schools and districts. They also help us identify achievement gaps between different groups of students.

I know the need to correct our course is urgent, but we can't get there overnight. I'm asking New Yorkers to trust in the adjustments we've made so far and the purposeful changes we're going to make.

Our students are counting on us to give them every opportunity to succeed. The state tests are an important yardstick to measure how well we're meeting that responsibility. Let's all keep this in mind during test time this April.

MaryEllen Elia
State Education Commissioner