



2010 NYC Test Scores: AN EDUCATIONAL EMERGENCY

The release of the 2010 New York State reading and math test scores was a sobering moment for our city. While many parents, educators and testing experts had raised concerns about the validity of the test score increases over the last few years, it was shocking to see their worst fears confirmed. The test score results demonstrate that, while NYC students have made some progress in recent years, the learning gains claimed by the current administration are highly exaggerated. Although tens of thousands of additional students are now known to be off track for high school graduation and college success, the NYC Department of Education has proposed no plan of action to support and advance these students, and is continuing with business as usual.

BACKGROUND

The testing experts hired by the NY State Education Department (NYSED) to analyze the state exams found that the bar for proficiency was set far too low. Eighth graders who passed the state exams had only a 55% chance of scoring the 65 on the Math and English Regents exam required to graduate high school. They found that to have a reasonable chance of succeeding at CUNY, students need to score at least a 75 on the English Regents exam and an 80 on the Math Regents exam. In response, NYSED recalibrated the state tests so that:

1. Scoring proficient (Level 3) in 8th grade now indicates that a student has a 75% chance of achieving a 75 on the English Regents and 80 on the Math Regents exams.
2. Scoring basic (Level 2) in 8th grade now indicates that a student has a 75% chance of achieving a 65 on the Math and English Regents exams.
3. Scoring proficient in 3rd-7th grade indicates that if a student makes one year of progress each year, s/he will be on track to score proficient in 8th grade.

FACT: The majority of NYC students are not on track for success in college and careers.

- 42% of NYC students met state standards in English Language Arts (ELA) this year, compared to 69% last year
- 54% of NYC students citywide met state standards in Math this year, compared to 82% last year
- 14% of English Language Learners met standards for ELA, compared to 35% last year
- 13% of special education students met standards for ELA, compared to 35% last year
- 15% of students scored at the lowest level (Level 1) on ELA, compared to 3% last year
- Even without the change in scoring methodology, there would have been no increase in students reaching proficiency in either ELA or Math this year.

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FACT: This crisis affects hundreds of thousands of students.

- There are 238,974 students not meeting state standards in ELA this year, compared to 129,547 last year: an increase of more than 100,000 students.
- There are 63,399 students scoring at Level 1 in ELA this year, compared to 11,751 students last year – an increase of more than 50,000 students
- All of these students should be entitled to Academic Intervention Services to raise achievement – but this year a state waiver will allow the NYC Department of Education (DoE) to exclude many students from the services they need to get back on track, and the DoE has eliminated the Office of Academic Intervention Services that used to support and monitor AIS provision.

FACT: This crisis affects hundreds of schools in every borough.

- In 369 schools, at least 2 out of 3 students are not meeting standards in ELA – up from 5 schools with 2 out of 3 students not meeting standards in 2009.
- In 219 schools, at least 3 out of 4 students are not meeting standards in ELA – up from 3 schools with 3 out of 4 students not meeting standards in 2009.
- In 155 schools, at least 1 in 4 students scored in Level 1 in ELA – up from 1 school with 1 in 4 students scoring in Level 1 in 2009.
- 125 schools saw an increase of 20 points or more in the percentage of their students who scored at Level 1 and thus are not on track for high school graduation.

FACT: The crisis is especially dire in certain neighborhoods and schools.

- Most of the 126 schools where 75% or more of their students are below standard in ELA **and** 25% or more of their students are at Level 1 in ELA, are concentrated in just seven of the city’s 32 community school districts (4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12) —four of which are in the Bronx, and three in upper Manhattan.
- In 50 schools, 85% or more of the students are not meeting standards in ELA.

FACT: NYC’s scale score progress on state tests is average compared to other large cities in NY State.

Scale scores (average student test scores) in NYC are higher than in the state’s other four urban districts, but the city’s progress in 3rd-8th grade since 2006 is about average. In ELA, NYC ranks third for progress among the five big cities behind Buffalo and Rochester; in Math, NYC ties with Yonkers for second place out of five.

Big 5 Cities	ELA Progress 2006-10 (scale scores)	Big 5 Cities	Math Progress, 2006-10 (scale scores)
Buffalo	23	Rochester	32
Rochester	14	New York City	27
New York City	13	Yonkers	27
Yonkers	9	Buffalo	23
Syracuse	7	Syracuse	17

FACT: NYC has not significantly narrowed the scale score gap with NY State.

NYC’s gains in scale scores in 3rd-8th grades surpass the state average, but by such a small amount that it cannot be considered significant. Between 2006 and 2010 NYC advanced 5 points more than the state in ELA, and 3 points more than the state in Math. This amounts to a narrowing of the gap of approximately 1 point per year, on a test of 800 points – not a significant amount.

	NY City Progress, 2006-10	NY State Progress, 2006-10	Change in NYC-NYS Gap
ELA (average scale score)	13 points	8 points	- 5 points
Math (average scale score)	23 points	20 points	- 3 points

FACT: Because of flaws in the NY State tests, it is unclear whether remaining gains in scale scores are a result of real student learning or of test prep drills.

While NYC has seen some increases in scale scores, even those gains are suspect. The testing experts whose study led to the recalibration of the exams found that not only was the bar set too low, but the test is also too repetitive, and focused on too narrow a range of topics – two features that make the test especially susceptible to increases due to test prep. As Dan Koretz, the lead professor on the study, wrote to Commissioner Steiner in June, “...relatively little of the score gain on the New York 8th grade math test represented real, generalizable improvements in student performance” and “...in ELA as well, the apparent improvement in performance on the New York test appears to arise in substantial part from score inflation, a lowering of the standards, or both.”

FACT: While NYC has made some gains on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), that progress does not compare favorably with other cities nationally.

- In 4th grade Reading, among the 10 cities tested nationally, NYC has seen more growth than 1 city, less growth than 1 city, and no significant difference with the other 7 cities.
- In 8th grade Reading, NYC has seen less growth than 2 cities and no significant difference with the other 7 cities.

FACT: The racial achievement gap has not budged.

- There has been no narrowing of the racial achievement gap in any grade or subject on the NAEP tests since 2003.
- Only 33% of Black students and 34% of Latino students in NYC met state standards in ELA this year, compared to 64% of White students. This represents a widening of the racial achievement gap on state tests to the same size it was in 2003.

FACT: Huge amounts of resources and energy have been invested in NYC on an accountability system based on these faulty test scores.

- The DoE has spent more than \$30 million on bonuses to schools and principals based on faulty test scores, and hundreds of millions more on the accountability system centered on these scores.
- Dozens of elementary and middle schools have been closed based on faulty test scores.
- More than 11,000 students are being held back this year because of their test scores, with no plan or additional resources to help get them up to grade level.
- State tests have become a major focus of instruction in too many schools, and other courses are often squeezed out in favor of preparation for tests that do not accurately assess student learning.

CALL TO ACTION

These scores have profound implications for the future of our public school system. The NYC Department of Education has a responsibility to acknowledge this immense challenge and implement emergency policy changes to support struggling students and schools. *Save Our Schools (SOS)*, a broad coalition of parents, educators, advocates and elected officials, calls upon the NYC Department of Education to:

- 1. Provide intensive interventions for all students who scored in Levels 1 and 2, including those now in high school.**
- 2. Suspend for one year all high-stakes policy decisions that are based on standardized test scores and establish a revised accountability system based on reliable multiple measures.**
- 3. Provide comprehensive support and guidance to the city's most struggling schools.**

Save Our Schools calls on the DoE to work with parents and school communities to implement these proposals by prioritizing financial and program resources to serve the students and schools of greatest need. The current test score crisis serves as a reminder of the constitutional standard established in the Campaign for Fiscal Equity decision: New York City public school students have the right to a meaningful education through high school that will prepare them for competitive employment and active civic participation. The DoE must take forward steps with the students and schools it serves to make this right a reality.