

State cancels online testing Wednesday over software glitch

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The software being used for English language arts state testing in grades 3-8 in schools across New York crashed Tuesday morning, leaving students unable to log in and complete the tests and causing the state to cancel all online testing for Wednesday.

The department website notified districts of “a slowness with students being able to submit the test” and recommended having students wait 10 minutes then try again.

Officials in Churchville-Chili, East Rochester, Greece, Penfield, Spencerport and Webster were among those reporting problems

with the software.

Only about 25 percent of districts across the state are using online testing this year, according to the state. More than 84,000 students did have their tests properly submitted Tuesday.

The state told districts later in the day that online testing would be suspended Wednesday. “NYSED will use this time to work with Questar to ensure the system will operate smoothly when (computer-based testing) resumes,” DeSantis said. In an emergency conference call with state assessment directors, department officials described the problem as “essentially an overload of students across the state seeking to submit their e-assessments at or near the same time, causing significant upload and submission issues,” according to one official who was on the call.

New York State United Teachers, which has been critical of the move to computer-based testing, called on the state to stop testing on computers “to ensure that our children will not be penalized because of the mistakes adults have made in rolling out this faulty system.”

Strain on software

The Questar software had software issues last year as well, with some students unable to log in or save their progress. In 2017 some students’ personal information was exposed in a data breach.

In a statement, Questar COO Brad Baumgartner said: “Questar Assessment Inc. is aware of intermittent

2015 from the state Education Department to develop the English language arts and math exams. The state at the time had been facing growing discontent from parents and teachers over the exams and the previous test-maker, Pearson, a London-based testing giant.

The contract runs through 2020, according to state records. So far, about \$26 million has been dispersed to Questar.

“Despite claims to the contrary, clearly the state has not taken the actions needed to ensure that technological issues will not unduly burden students taking these already flawed state exams on computers,” the NYSUT statement read. The Monroe County Federation of Teachers declared itself “disgusted.”

On the other hand, Education Trust New York Executive Director Ian Rosenblum said: “The state Education Department has earned the confidence of parents and the public, and we wish that the opponents of state assessments would stop politicizing the tests while students are taking them.”

Testing is two days this year, down from three in the past, and districts can choose which days of the week to utilize. Some started on Monday but more began Tuesday, straining the software.

delays with online testing at some schools in New York Tuesday. Questar is proactively working with NYSED and individual school districts to keep them informed. Despite some delays, approximately 60,000 test sessions were successfully submitted Tuesday morning.”

A separate issue affecting proctors but not students was addressed Monday night, according to a statement on the state Education Department website.

Questar won a five-year, \$44 million contract in

In response to the error, the state Education Department extended the last possible day for English language arts testing to April 12. Math is scheduled for early May.

Not all districts are using computers for the testing. Some, including Hilton, Honeoye Falls-Lima and Pittsford are continuing with the traditional paper tests.

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