

Online state testing to partially resume Thursday

Software failures caused 1-day hiatus Wednesday

Justin Murphy

Rochester Democrat and Chronicle USA TODAY NETWORK

Computer-based English language arts testing will partially resume Thursday for students across New York after software failures Tuesday and a oneday hiatus Wednesday, state Education Commissioner MaryEllen Elia said.

Students in grades 5 and 8 can take online tests Thursday, but other grades will be staggered across the remaining open period for testing in order to avoid overloading the Questar Assessment Inc. software, which is now in its second year of inadequate performance.

“There is no excuse for the difficulties experienced by schools administering computer-based testing,” Elia said in a statement. “We are holding Questar accountable for its failure to deliver the services required in our contract with them.”

This is the first week of testing for students in grades 3-8 for students across the state. About a quarter of them are taking their tests online rather than on paper.

Schools are allowed to pick which days they use for testing during the week. As statewide participation surged Tuesday, the Questar software the state uses became overwhelmed and would not let students submit their work.

According to the state Education Department, Questar concluded that its servers ran out of memory at the point when tens of thousands of students across the state were trying to log in or submit their results.

Students’ work was saved on their computers, and the state said 84,000 students — about 93 percent of all testtakers — were able to submit their finished tests. But the state teachers union nonetheless called on the state to abandon computer-based testing until it can administer it with more confidence.

Questar comments

their recommendations. As such, testing will resume Thursday. Of the 93,100 total students who started tests on Tuesday, 93 percent of, or 86,500, students who started testing sessions successfully completed and submitted their tests that day.”

It is the third consecutive year of software glitches for Questar, which received a five-year, \$45 million contract in 2015 from the state Education Department. Last year the software was swamped as well; in 2017, some students had their personal data exposed.

The state Education Department will review its contract with Questar to see whether it can levy any financial punishment for “its failure to fulfill its contract to deliver reliable and seamless computer-based assessments in New York state.” That includes considering canceling the contract, Elia said.

Additional paper tests also will be distributed to schools that prefer to switch to those.

Schools have until April 12 to finish the two-day English language arts exams. Math tests will be administered in early May. Questar said they take their responsibility “to provide accurate and insightful testing results seriously.”

JMURPHY7@Gannett.com



MaryEllen Elia is New York’s education commissioner. MIKE GROLL/AP

Questar Chief Operating Officer Brad Baumgartner released a statement Wednesday afternoon. “We understand the frustration, and our team has been working around the clock to ensure New York schools can resume computerbased testing as soon as possible. We have consulted with respected outside firms and have wasted no time implementing