



September 2015

**TO:** District Superintendents  
Superintendents of Public and Nonpublic Schools  
Principals of Public and Nonpublic Schools  
Superintendents of State Operated Schools  
Leaders of Charter Schools  
Special Education Directors  
Chairpersons of Committees on Special Education  
Project Managers for the Level I Data Repositories  
Directors of Regional Information Centers

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Office of Special Education

**SUBJECT:** Changes to the New York State Alternate Assessment Beginning with the 2015-16 School Year

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide information on changes in the method and timeline for administration of the New York State Alternate Assessment (NYSAA) beginning with the 2015-16 school year. NYSAA is the State testing program that measures attainment of the State's learning standards in the areas of English language arts (ELA), mathematics, science, and social studies for all students with severe disabilities<sup>1</sup> in Grades 3-8 and high school.

Over the past few years, the New York State Education Department (NYSED) has been engaged in numerous conversations with educators from across the State about potential revisions to the NYSAA to ensure that the assessment more appropriately assesses the range of students with severe disabilities and addresses time and resource concerns of the educators who administer the NYSAA. As a result of these conversations, NYSED took steps to research an alternate assessment that would allow students with severe disabilities to more fully demonstrate their knowledge; that would be more efficient to administer and score; and that would provide useful and timely information to inform

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<sup>1</sup> Students with severe disabilities means students who have limited cognitive abilities combined with behavioral and/or physical limitations and who require highly specialized education, social, psychological and medical services in order to maximize their full potential for useful and meaningful participation in society and for self-fulfillment. Students with severe disabilities may experience severe speech, language, and/or perceptual-cognitive impairments, and evidence challenging behaviors that interfere with learning and socialization opportunities. These students may also have extremely fragile physiological conditions and may require personal care, physical/verbal supports and/or prompts and assistive technology devices.  
8 NYCRR §100.1(t)(2)(iv)

instruction for the student. A Request for Proposals was released in Spring 2015 soliciting assessment programs that address, to the extent possible, the concerns and recommendations received from educators on the NYSAA. Proposal review committees included NYS educators from throughout the State, and these educators will continue to advise NYSED on the implementation the NYSAA, especially as the ELA and mathematics alternate assessments transition to a new format during the 2015-16 school year.

The following includes information specific to the two different assessment methods and timelines for NYSAA administration.

## **English Language Arts and Mathematics**

Beginning with the 2015-16 school year, ELA and mathematics will be assessed using Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM). DLM is a computer-delivered adaptive assessment measuring a student's achievement of the ELA and mathematics Common Core Learning Standards at a reduced level of depth, breadth, and complexity. This assessment provides the opportunity to customize the assessment to the individual abilities and needs of the student, is designed to measure a wide range of proficiencies of students, is quicker and easier to administer and score, and provides useful information to teachers to inform future instruction for the student. Administration of the NYSAA ELA and mathematics tests are scheduled for March 21, 2016 to June 3, 2016.

### Key Characteristics of the New NYSAA in ELA and Mathematics

- Assessments are administered individually to each student with a severe disability based upon the student's chronological age.
- Assessments are administered by using a computer or other electronic device to allow for assessment tasks to be adapted to the student's level of proficiency, thus allowing for an assessment that measures a greater breadth of proficiency than in the past. Computer-administered assessments will also allow for a wide range of technology-based assistive devices to be available.
- No printed copies are provided unless required due to technology infrastructure issues or individual needs for a non-computerized testing format.
- Assessments are scored by, or with the assistance of, computer software.
- Scores are reported electronically and much more quickly than in the past.
- Scannable score sheets or answer sheets are not needed.
- Collegial Review and the creation of Verifying Evidence are eliminated.

Turnkey training will be provided by NYSED and DLM to the local Alternate Assessment Training Network (AATN) specialists in the late fall.

NYSED recommends that districts and schools select technology and devices based on instructional needs, not computer-based testing (CBT) needs. However, it is important to keep in mind the minimum specifications and technology infrastructure needed to support CBT. NYSED has worked with DLM to outline the minimum technology requirements. That document, along with other resources and guidance, will be posted online at <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/technology/CBT>. NYSED will continue to publish CBT resources and documentation on this website. Additionally, educators are encouraged to contact their district's technology liaison.

## Science and Social Studies

At this time the testing industry does not have an adaptive alternate assessment that meets NYSED's needs and addresses the concerns and recommendations heard from educators in the State, so the Science and Social Studies NYSAA will continue to be submitted in the current hard-copy, or portfolio-style format and Measured Progress, Inc. will continue as the contractor. In the coming years, NYSED will be moving forward with new frameworks in social studies and revised standards in science for all students. While this transition is occurring, NYSED will gather feedback from educators on the science and social studies components of NYSAA to inform new directions for the future of these portions of the NYSAA program. In the meantime, key characteristics of the science and social studies components will remain the same. Assessments for science and social studies are scheduled for January 4, 2016 to February 12, 2016.

### Key Characteristics of the NYSAA in Science and Social Studies

- Assessments are administered individually to each student with a severe cognitive disability based upon the student's chronological age.
- Hard copies of assessments are completed by hand, or by using the Measured Progress ProFile™ software, and pages are printed out to be submitted for scoring at the NYSAA scoring institutes.
- Datafolio-style assessments are printed out and compiled into three-ring binders.
- Scannable score sheets or answer sheets continue to be used.
- Assessments are scored in a hard-copy format at regional scoring institutes and in big-city scoring centers.
- Scores are reported using the Regional Information Centers (RICs) and large-city scanning centers interfacing with NYSED's Student Information Repository System.
- The customary recommendation that there be a time period of at least 15 school days between the baseline and the final administration will be shortened or eliminated.

Turnkey training will be provided by NYSED and Measured Progress, Inc. to NYSAA networks (AATN specialists, Score Site Coordinators, and Regional Lead Trainers) in the late fall. Using the Measured Progress iEnrollment system, AATN specialists will verify the schools and sites within their respective regions that will administer the 2015-16 NYSAA in science and/or social studies. A master set of these materials will be shipped to each site verified and materials can be duplicated as needed.

### **Additional Information**

- Consistent with previous years, all students with severe disabilities taking the NYSAA are assessed annually in the content areas indicated for each grade in accordance with the grade levels that correspond with their dates of birth. Information regarding the content areas and grade level to be assessed as aligned to the student's chronological age is available in the 2015-16 NYSAA Age Range Chart (<http://www.p12.nysed.gov/assessment/nysaa/2015-16/agerange15.pdf>).
- Attached for your reference is a chart of the overall format of the NYSAA, organized by content area to be assessed.

- Schools should expect that local NYSAA administration trainings for all four content areas will take place in late November 2015, or soon thereafter. The local AATN specialists will disseminate dates and locations for their local training sessions.
- Further details and administration materials for the 2015-16 administration of all four content areas will be posted on the NYSAA home page at <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/assessment/nysaa/home.html>.

NYSED recognizes that 2015-16 will be a year of transition for the NYSAA; however, educators, NYSED, and our contractors will work cooperatively to ensure that special education teachers and administrators are provided with the necessary information, technical assistance, and support that they will need for a successful year of testing. If you have questions, you may contact the Office of State Assessment at (518) 474-5900 or (518) 474-5902.

Attachment

## NYSAA 2015-16 Overview of Content Areas

Content Area	Grades Assessed	Administration Format	Administration Period	Scoring Period	Scoring Format	Test Contractor
English Language Arts	3-8 and High School	Computer-Based Test	March 21, 2016 through June 3, 2016	N/A*	Computer-Based Scoring	Dynamic Learning Maps
Mathematics	3-8 and High School	Computer-Based Test	March 21, 2016 through June 3, 2016	N/A*	Computer-Based Scoring	Dynamic Learning Maps
Science	4, 8, and High School	Portfolio-Style-Datafolio	January 4, 2016 through Feb. 12, 2016	Feb. 29, 2016 through March 18, 2016	Regional Scoring Institutes	Measured Progress, Inc.
Social Studies	High School	Portfolio-Style-Datafolio	January 4, 2016 through Feb. 12, 2016	Feb. 29, 2016 through March 18, 2016	Regional Scoring Institutes	Measured Progress, Inc.

\*Not Applicable