

## Participating in NYS Exams

### *Why high participation rates help Ballston Spa Students, Staff, and Schools*

As we head toward spring and the administration of the grades 3-8 state assessments in English Language Arts (*April 1 – 8*) and Mathematics (*April 30 – May 7*), we want to thank our district’s teachers, parents, students, and administrators for the work that is done each day to maximize each student’s learning potential. As a part of our educational program, we utilize a variety of assessments – local and state assessments alike – to determine each student’s progress and how we can best address any areas of weakness or opportunities for extension of learning. Although these assessments are a required component of any district’s educational program, some have chosen to challenge various state policies and approaches by allowing their children to refuse to take the state assessments in particular. Before we begin state testing and the associated decision-making by parents this year, we wanted to share some of the specific reasons why we encourage every child to participate in these assessments. By participating in these assessments, we are:

1. ***Allowing our students to demonstrate what they know and are able to do in terms of expectations set by the state standards:***
  - Results help us analyze the effectiveness of our curriculum and instruction which is developed locally by our teachers and administrators to meet the state standards (learning expectations)
  - Results allow us to objectively compare the progress of our students with students in other schools and districts which allows us to have a better sense of our progress. (Our locally designed assessments do not allow for such a comparison.)
2. ***Supporting the hard work of our teachers and administrators:***
  - With assessment data in hand, teachers can now utilize the entire instructional cycle – standards, curriculum, instruction, assessments, analysis of results, intervention planning for improvement, and professional learning – to continuously improve the opportunities provided to our students.
3. ***Preparing our students for future standards-based instruction and assessments***
  - When students take the 3-8 assessments, they are “practicing” in a sense for future assessments, such as Regents exams, Advanced Placement exams, International Baccalaureate exams, Career and Technical Education National

Exams, the SAT and ACT, etc. It is reassuring that on the 3-8 assessments, *students do not pass or fail* nor do they fail content area courses or get held back in their current grade based on their assessment results. They are deemed to have met proficiency or not – and then future guidance or support services are provided accordingly. These 3-8 assessments also build the stamina and “grit” students will need for future high school exams.

4. ***Providing the district with critical information:***

- We gain information about our students, our professional learning, and the investments that we make with taxpayer dollars. A high participation rate means we have more objective information when making decisions therefore allowing us to better guarantee an effective return on investment.

5. ***Ensuring that the District remains in good standing with the state and federal government based on the rules set forward for student participation and progress.***

It is worth noting that the assessments have changed in recent years as they have moved from three days to two and contain fewer questions so as to be fair to our students. Nonetheless, the amount of time is still a bit challenging for some, but is one of the key features in establishing the validity of the assessment.

Of further note, student performance on the 2019 Grades 3-8 ELA and Mathematics Tests ***will have no employment-related consequences for teacher and principal evaluations***. This means no teachers or principals in New York State public schools will be affected by the results of the 2019 Grades 3-8 ELA and Math Tests.

There are some voices (state and national) encouraging parents to allow their children to refuse to participate in upcoming standardized assessments as a form of protest. If you hear things you wonder about, we encourage you to ask questions. As with many issues, this one has its share of inaccurate information being circulated on social media and elsewhere. If you wonder, please ask us.

We want you to know that we greatly appreciate the challenges that these decisions present to families here in Ballston Spa. But simply put, having students take these assessments helps us see how our students are meeting expectations; understand specific areas in which our students are successful; and identify specific areas in which our students struggle so that we can best focus our efforts to prepare students to succeed and be ***ready*** for their next steps.