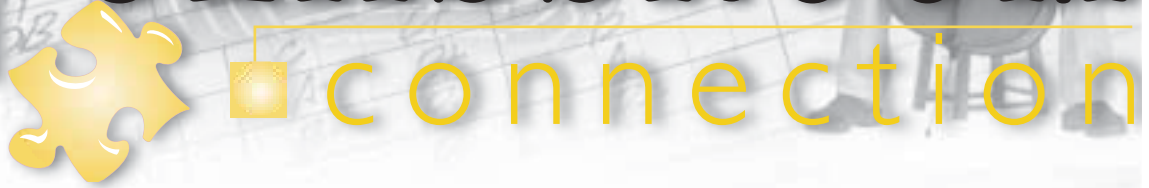


A Publication for

LISHA KILL &
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MIDDLE
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CLASSROOM



The new state tests in grades 6-8 What families need to know

This school year, children in grades 6, 7 and 8 will take new state tests in English language arts and math. Similar exams have been in place for eighth graders for a number of years, as have tests in second languages, science, social studies and technology.

Although testing at all levels can provide useful feedback about how well children are learning their lessons, testing during the middle school years is considered particularly important.

The pre-teen years are a time of rapid change for kids. Physically, socially and emotionally, the years between 10 and 13 rival the first three years of children's lives in terms of growth. Often, all this upheaval can leave kids less self-assured and less interested in academics.

However, demanding state and national learning standards don't allow students the luxury of taking a break from academics during the middle school years. Everything about school today—from the courses students take to the tests they need to pass in order to graduate—is more demanding than ever before. Success with their middle school lessons now will help students excel later on.

Testing children regularly throughout the middle school years is one way of ensuring that they are progressing academically. Such tests help show whether children need additional help to confidently move ahead in school. These tests will also help teachers identify where the curriculum might need to be fine-tuned to better meet students' needs.

A look at the new middle school tests

The new state tests are carefully designed to reflect the types of information and skills that children are expected to learn at their respective grade levels. Although students will be given opportunities throughout the year to become familiar with the format of these tests, the school year will not be spent drilling for these exams. Instead, the primary focus of middle school education is on expanding children's knowledge in many subject areas, teaching them to be more self-reliant and preparing them for the academic challenges that lay ahead.

THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS (ELA) TESTS

The English language arts tests are administered in two sessions for students in grade 7 and three sessions in grades 6 and 8. These exams are designed to measure students' abilities in reading, listening and writing. The tests contain a variety of questions including **multiple choice, short- and extended-response and editing tasks.**

MATH

The middle school mathematics tests are administered in two sessions in grades 6 and 7 and three sessions in grade 8. They are designed to assess how well students have mastered the newly proposed mathematics learning standard.

At all grade levels, students will apply the skills and knowledge gained in the classroom in order to answer three types of questions: multiple-choice, short-response, and extended-response.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS:

Sample listening question (grade 6)

After listening to a story about Sojourner Truth, a woman whose heroic life inspired many both before and after the Civil War, students will answer questions such as the following:

1. Why do you think Sojourner Truth changed her name from the one she was given when she was born? Was her choice of name a good one? Write an essay in which you explain why Sojourner Truth changed her name, what that name represented to her, and whether the name was a good choice. Use details from the article to support your answer. In your answer, be sure to include:

- why Sojourner Truth changed her name
- what her new name represented to her
- whether her new name was a good choice
- details from the article to support your answer

Check your writing for correct spelling, grammar and punctuation.

Sample editing question (grade 7)

There are some mistakes in this paragraph. Some sentences may have more than one mistake, and other sentences may contain no mistakes at all. There are no mistakes in spelling. Read the paragraph and find the mistakes. Draw a line through each mistake in the paragraph. Then write the correction above it.

When you look up at the night sky, you see the beautiful stars shining, you see a full moon. The view from space can be quite another matter, though. From Earth you cannot see none of the nuts, bolts, paint chips, and other assorted pieces of space debris orbits Earth every day. The worst thing about space debris is not it's ugly appearance; space debris can be extremely dangerously. These bits of metal and other junk travels through the air at speeds greater than 20,000 miles an hour and can create serious damage.

Sample math short response question (grade 6)

Elissa and Matt bought $\frac{7}{8}$ of a yard of fabric to make a class project. They used only $\frac{1}{3}$ of a yard. How much fabric was left? Show your work.
Answer: yard

Sample math Multiple choice question (grade 8)

The regular price of a CD is \$18.00. If the CD is on sale for 15% off the regular price, what is the sale price?

- A \$2.70 C \$16.20
- B \$15.30 D \$16.50

Want your middle schooler to perform better on tests?

Reading = quality time and academic success

If you're a parent you know how difficult it is to fit everything into one day. Juggling work, sleep and family commitments into a 24-hour period can seem nearly impossible.

Well here's one more thing to fit in between Little League, Girl Scouts, dishes and mowing the lawn ... it's reading. Fitting 20 minutes of reading with your child into an already jam-packed schedule may seem ridiculous - but it's so important. Reading together is a surefire way to slow down and spend precious "quality time" with your kids while improving their academic performance.

Here are a few ideas for making the most of that time and getting your child on the right track:

- ▶ **Begin reading to children as youngsters** (if it's not too late). The younger they start, the better off they will be. Remember: the art of listening must be taught gradually - it doesn't happen over night.
- ▶ **Choose a quiet spot for you and your child.** Make a special place in your home where your child can read and write.
- ▶ **Read aloud together with your child for at least 20 minutes a day.** Make it fun by reading outdoors (in good weather) on the front steps, patio, at the beach or park. Also, let your children read to you. For younger children, point out the relationship between words and sounds.
- ▶ **Set a good example.** Parents must be willing to model behavior for their children. Keep lots of reading material around the house. Turn off the TV and have each person read his or her book, including mom and dad.
- ▶ **Read the same book your child is reading and discuss it.** This is the way to develop habits of the mind and build capacity for thought and insight.
- ▶ **Talk to your child** when you play and do daily activities together.
- ▶ **Keep washable, nontoxic crayons and markers and paper** where your child can reach them.

- ▶ **Show your child how you read** every day for fun and work.
- ▶ **Visit the library/bookstore with your child** to attend story times, choose books to read and home and on vacation.
- ▶ **Let kids choose what they want to read,** and don't turn your nose up at popular fiction. It will only discourage the reading habit.
- ▶ **Buy books on tape,** especially for a child with a learning disability. Listen to them in the car, or turn off the TV and have the family listen to them together.
- ▶ **Subscribe, in your child's name, to magazines** like Sports Illustrated for Kids, Highlights for Children, or National Geographic World. Encourage older children to read the newspaper and current events magazines, to keep up the reading habit over the summer
- ▶ **and develop vocabulary.** Ask them what they think about what they're read, and listen to what they say.
- ▶ **Make trips a way to encourage reading** by reading aloud traffic signs, billboards, notices. Show your children how to read a map, and once you are on the road, let them take turns being the navigator.
- ▶ **Encourage your children to keep a journal or scrapbook.** Write about or tape in souvenirs of your family vacations, postcards, ticket stubs, photos, etc. Have your children write the captions and read them aloud as you look at the book together.
- ▶ **Encourage far away relatives to record stories on audiotapes and mail them to your child.** Have your child email them as often as possible so they can work on their writing skills.



MARK YOUR calendar

NEWYORK STATE TESTING SCHEDULE

▶ JANUARY 16-20 Grade 6 ELA Exam	▶ APRIL 25-26 Grade 8 Science Performance Exam
▶ JANUARY 16-17 Grade 7-8 ELA Exam	▶ JUNE 7-8 Grade 8 Social Studies Exam
▶ MARCH 14-15 Grade 6-8 Math Exams	

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