

Regents exams cancelled

State Education Department issues guidance on graduation & course requirement changes due to COVID-19 and ongoing statewide school closure

The New York State Education Department on Tuesday announced the cancellation of the June 2020 administration of Regents exams, and released guidance on modifications to requirements for students to graduate and earn their high school diplomas, credentials and endorsements.

In addition, due to the school closures related to COVID-19, the department delayed the rollout of state assessments aligned to the grades 3-8 "Next Generation Learning Standards" for English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics for one year, to spring 2022. Similarly, the alignment of state assessments to the "New York P-12 Science Learning Standards" will begin in spring 2023. Further, the state extended its current grades 3-8 ELA and math testing contract by one year.

"In times of crisis, difficult decisions must be made, and the Board of Regents knows these are ultimately the right ones for New York's students," Board of Regents Chancellor Betty A. Rosa said. "We are putting the safety of children, families and educators first, while ensuring that the hard work done by our students and teachers is honored. These are extraordinary decisions for an unprecedented time, and we thank our school communities for their support and continuing dedication during the statewide school closure."

Interim Commissioner Shannon Tahoe said, "Every day we see more and more examples of the tireless dedication of educators, administrators and parents to support their students as they continue to learn and work toward a meaningful diploma during the state of emergency, and we are grateful to them for their efforts. During this time of great uncertainty, the department has developed this guidance to ensure that students who were on

track to graduate this year will have that opportunity."

Regents Exams and Diploma Requirements

A press release said, "The COVID-19 emergency has evolved rapidly, leading to uncertainty as to when regular in-school classroom instruction will be able to resume throughout the state and whether students will be adequately prepared to take the Regents examinations. As a result, the Board of Regents and department have cancelled the June 2020 administration of the NYS High School Regents Examination Program.

"Because of this, the department has modified the requirements that students must meet in order to earn high school diplomas, credentials and endorsements. These modifications apply to all students enrolled in grades 7-12 during the 2019-20 school year who were intending to participate in one or more of the June 2020 Regents examinations."

Students who, during the June 2020 examination period would have taken one or more Regents examinations, will be exempted from passing the assessments in order to be issued a diploma. To qualify for the exemption, students must meet one of the following eligibility requirements:

- The student is currently enrolled in a course of study culminating in a Regents examination and will have earned credit in such course of study by the end of the 2019-20 school year; or

- The student is in grade 7, is enrolled in a course of study culminating in a Regents examination and will have passed such course of study by the end of the 2019-20 school year; or

- The student is currently enrolled in a course of study culminating in a Regents examination and has failed to earn credit by the end of the school year. Such student returns for summer in-

struction to make up the failed course and earn the course credit and is subsequently granted diploma credit in August 2020; or

- The student was previously enrolled in the course of study leading to an applicable Regents examination, has achieved course credit, and has not yet passed the associated Regents examination but intended to take the test in June 2020 to achieve a passing score.

NYSED guidance issued on March 13 outlined the requirements for granting diploma credit for courses interrupted by the COVID-19 closures.

In addition, the guidance also provides information on:

- √ NYSED-approved +1 Pathway Assessments;

- √ Languages other than English (LOTE) locally developed checkpoint B examinations;

- √ Career development and occupational studies (CDOS) commencement credential and +1 Pathway;

- √ Use of safety nets;

- √ Diploma endorsements including honors, mastery and CTE technical endorsement; and

- √ Accountability determinations.

NYSED will develop guidance on how schools and districts should record the exemptions from examination requirements. Student transcripts should not reflect an examination score for any examination for which the student is exempted.

A helpful "frequently asked questions" document is available now and will be updated regularly on the department's dedicated COVID-19 Information site.

Next Generation ELA, Math and Science Learning Standards

The Board of Regents adopted the new "P-12 Science Learning Standards" in December 2016 and the revised "Next Generation English Language Arts and Mathematics Learning Standards" in September 2017.

A press release said, "These standards are the result of years of collaborative and transparent work to ensure New York state has the best learning standards for students and work to implement the standards in a thoughtful manner has been ongoing. Throughout that time, the Board of Regents and department have committed to timelines that make the needs of students and necessary professional learning for educators top priorities.

"Therefore, the 'Next Generation ELA' and mathematics im-

plementation timeline has been updated to reflect that state assessments will be aligned to the new learning standards in spring 2022 to allow districts to make up the professional learning time lost by the school closures related to COVID-19."

The overall timeline for the implementation of the "Next Generation ELA and Mathematics Standards" is now as follows:

- √ September 2017: adoption of "NYS Next Generation Learning Standards"

- √ Phase one: raise awareness (winter 2018-winter/spring 2019): professional development on "NYS Next Generation Learning Standards"; two-day assessments measuring the 2011 P-12 learning standards.

- √ Phase two: build capacity (2018-19, 2019-20 and 2020-21)*: professional development continuing on "NYS Next Generation Learning Standards"; two-day assessments measuring the 2011 P-12 learning standards.

- √ Phase three full implementation (September 2021 - ongoing): full implementation of the "NYS Next Generation Learning Standards."

- √ Spring 2022: New grade 3-8 tests measuring the "NYS Next Generation Learning Standards."

*The 2019-20 assessments were not given due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The press release noted, "This delay affords NYSED the opportunity to better align this transition with the implementation of the 'New York State P-12 Science Learning Standards,' as well."

The transition to new exams measuring the new "New York State P-12 Science Learning Standards" in grades 5 and 8 will begin in spring 2023. This will allow districts to make up the professional learning time lost by the school closures related to COVID-19. Detailed information and a revised timeline on the activities to engage and assist districts with their local implementation over this multi-year phase-in are available on the curriculum and instruction website.

Elementary and Intermediate-Level State Assessment Contract Extended

In March, the department made the unprecedented decision to suspend administration of the grades 3-8 ELA and math assessments for the remainder of this school year, due to the statewide closure of schools related to COVID-19. At the time of this decision, the state assessments

were prepared and ready to be administered. To make use of these assessments that were developed by New York state educators - and due to the delay in the timeline for assessments based on NGLS - the department has extended the state's current contract with Questar Assessment Inc.

The Office of the State Comptroller approved an extension of the Questar contract to administer both the grades 3-8 ELA and math operational tests and the spring standalone field tests (SAFT), based on these extraordinary circumstances. NYSED has cancelled the current request for proposals for a new assessment vendor contract and will re-issue it at a later date.

The press release concluded, "NYSED and the Board of Regents remain in continued contact with the Department of Health, the Division of Homeland Security, the Office of Children and Family Services and the governor's office. As the situation has evolved, so have our guidance and resources, which are continually being updated and added to the department's dedicated COVID-19 website."

New York State School Boards Association Response

New York State School Boards Association Executive Director Robert Schneider said, "Students across New York state can breathe a collective sigh of relief. The State Education Department has cancelled Regents exams for June 2020 - and rightfully so. No student should be denied course credit or a high school diploma or otherwise penalized due to these extraordinary circumstances. Guidance issued by the State Education Department focuses on ensuring learning outcomes and standards, rather than on testing. In our view, that is the proper focus.

"Teachers and administrators are making every effort to deliver instruction, and should be applauded for that. At the same time, it would be unrealistic to expect that all students are receiving equal opportunities for instruction under the current circumstances."

New York State United Teachers Response

New York State United Teachers President Andy Pallotta said, "This is the right decision that will allow our students and their families to first and foremost focus on being safe and healthy without having to stress about preparing for traditional end-of-year exams this June. We thank Regents Chancellor Betty Rosa, the board and the department for putting students first with changes to state exam requirements that still allow their hard work toward achieving a diploma to be recognized without penalizing them during this unprecedented crisis."

New York State United Teachers is a statewide union with more than 600,000 members in education, human services and health care. NYSUT is affiliated with the American Federation of Teachers, the National Education Association and the AFL-CIO.

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