

The Tyranny of Testing:

A compilation
of first-hand accounts
detailing the many problems
with the state's
standardized tests

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Agonizing. Absurd. Abusive.

That's how educators and parents who took part in the union's "Share Your Story" campaign described this year's grades 3-8 state testing debacle.

After receiving a wide variety of disturbing reports from educators around the state, NYSUT set up a "Share Your Story" email link so educators and parents could detail their testing experiences with State Education Commissioner MaryEllen Elia and members of the Board of Regents. The stories are painful to read.

These were not form letters. Nearly 200 educators, parents and grandparents took the time to write personal stories detailing how the 2018 exams were grueling, frustrating exercises for children and educators alike.

Some of the emails are heartbreaking, describing children in tears and actually pulling their hair out. Other letters expressed anger, with teachers calling the tests nothing short of "child abuse" and asking why education leaders have ignored repeated warnings. A number of emails predicted that New York's opt-out rate — already the highest in the nation — would only increase, unless policymakers bring some sanity to the state's testing system.

"Our members, parents and even grandparents have spoken from the heart about what the state's testing regime is doing to students and teachers," said NYSUT Andy Pallotta. "It's crucial for our education leaders to hear these on-the-ground reports. And with these incredibly compelling personal stories filling SED's email in-boxes, we are hopeful they will do the right thing."

COMPUTER DEBACLE

While New York’s annual state “testing season” is always stressful for students, parents and educators, this year was considerably worse, according to reports from around the state.

This was the first full administration by the state’s new testing vendor, Questar Assessment, Inc., a Minnesota-based company hired under a five-year, \$44 million contract. The grades 3–8 ELA tests were scheduled between April 11–13 for the traditional paper-based tests and April 10–17 for new computer-based tests. The state began piloting paper- to computer-based testing on a voluntary basis in 2016, with an eye toward testing all students by computer in 2020.

For the 300 schools test-driving the new computer-based exams this year, the ride was even bumpier than the union predicted. There were widespread technological problems, where students were unable to log in, lost work, or had to repeat entire tests. Some students attempting to answer multiple-choice questions reportedly could only choose among four answers — all of which said “system error.” While SED initially tried to call server crashes and other problems “glitches,” Elia eventually called the problems “an unacceptable failure” and vowed to hold the testing company accountable.

NYSUT has repeatedly sounded the alarm on the state’s rush to computer-based testing, raising strong concerns and questions. After a data breach earlier this year, NYSUT Executive Vice President Jolene T. DiBrango wrote a detailed letter to SED and the Board of Regents, calling on them to put the brakes on computer-based testing. NYSUT voiced concerns about a lack of infrastructure and poor Internet capability in some schools and questioned whether computer-based testing accurately measures student learning — or just how well students can maneuver around a keyboard.



EXCESSIVE TESTING TIME

Though SED touted changes that cut the number of testing days from three to two, many educators said it felt more like SED simply crammed three days’ worth of testing into two.

Educators said there were still far too many reading passages and questions. They noted the sheer volume of reading passages, multiple-choice questions and written responses was developmentally inappropriate — especially for third- and fourth-graders. Several commented how it doesn’t make sense that students spend more time taking an ELA test than they spend on a Regents Exam or the SAT for college.

Now that the tests are untimed, educators reported excessively long periods of testing time for many students — even eight years-olds who sat for five or six hours to finish their work. “This was supposed to be a 90-minute test!” said one teacher. “Some of our students worked up to 12 hours on a two-day test,” said a Binghamton educator.

Others said it was heartbreaking to watch helplessly as students continued testing through their lunch period and recess. Teachers noted those who took long periods of time on tests were not just students with disabilities and English language learners who are entitled to extended time — many of their brightest and most conscientious students worked on the tests for every minute they were allowed. Students were upset when they were unable to finish.

“The bottom line is these tests are too long and too difficult,” said a Westchester teacher. “How about a one-day test with 10 multiple choice questions, two response questions and one extended response?”

DEVELOPMENTALLY INAPPROPRIATE

Teachers around the state noted the tests were so developmentally inappropriate that they aren’t even valid or of any use in planning instruction. Reading passages were largely above grade level, causing great frustration. One fourth-grade teacher noted not one passage was at grade level and that too many questions required inference skills that were above students’ developmental level.

“You don’t have to be an educator to know that this is developmentally inappropriate and ethically horrid,” wrote one third-grade teacher. “It was actually painful to watch. Your desire to design a more fair test by reducing it to two days instead of three has failed miserably. You ended up with a test that cannot and should not be supported educationally, emotionally and psychologically by anyone who works with and cares about children.”

Questions that make students flip back and forth over and over, or force students to compare one paragraph to another, are also not developmentally appropriate, one teacher said. For computer-based testing, educators noted many of the youngest students do not have the typewriting skills to write well-thought-out responses. “Many do not know about the space bar,” one teacher said. “My students are wonderful paper and pencil writers of responses to prompts. When it comes to do the same task on the computer, it becomes a disaster.”

Field test questions — which are often above grade level — should not be imbedded, many teachers noted. “Some kids become frustrated and give up when something is too hard for them,” wrote one. “So a story that doesn’t even count screws that kid out of their best effort for the rest of the test.”

Many educators commented how the excessive testing time was developmentally inappropriate, with several challenging the commissioner and Regents to take one of the tests themselves. “This goes against everything we know about child development and cognitive effort,” wrote one. “When was the last time you took a 5.5-hour test?” asked another.

BLOOD, SWEAT AND TEARS

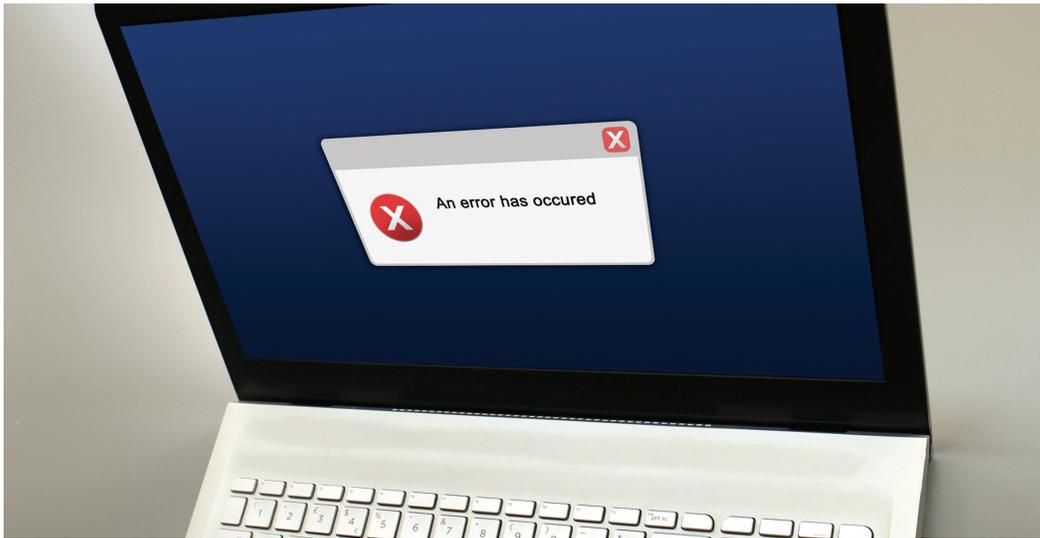
There were numerous reports of students crying, getting physically sick and expressing great stress over vague and confusing test questions. Some teachers who looked at exams while they were proctoring said questions were so poorly constructed that even they were not sure what the correct answer was.

A hall monitor reported she had never seen so many students looking to get out of the testing site to get a drink of water or use the bathroom. “I have also never seen so many tears,” she added.

“Half of my sixth-grade students worked for 3–6 hours during the second day of testing,” said an Ontario County teacher. “This is CRUEL AND INHUMANE PUNISHMENT! No child should have to test for this amount of time.”

Educators also noted cruel instances where students were ostracized or punished because their parents opted them out of tests. There were also reports district administrators pressured parents to reconsider their decision to opt their children out. Several educators and parents noted that this year’s round of testing would only serve to encourage more parents to opt their children out of testing.

“Stop this incessant need to test and assess constantly,” wrote one educator. “Let the teachers teach. Let learning be fun again.”



Computer Debacle

The testing for English Language Arts on the computer could only be described as a train wreck ... the test site was not online for at least an hour after it should have started ... once the test did start, multiple glitches occurred, from computers shutting off, problems loading, tests not allowing students that completed their tests to submit them ... instances of children spending hours taking a test and when they tried to submit, their test was completely deleted. Try telling a child their test was erased because of a glitch.

— Orange County elementary teacher

Some testing screens froze, some students were kicked off in the middle of their test, and in the end, a few students attempted to submit only to have their data lost. **The look of defeat on their faces as they saw error messages appear on the screens was heartbreaking.**

— Orange County elementary teacher

This year my school district decided to go with computer-based testing for third grade. For session two ... we were faced with students not being able to log in, tests not being able to load and by the time we started them the first ones logged in were logged off ... I actually had to log one particular student in at least 20 times.

By day's end, I had six children who were unable to finish. Imagine how well they slept that night. Thankfully, someone in my district called someone in the state and we were told those students could pick up where they left off the following day (so a three-day test).

— Niagara County elementary school teacher

As a fourth-grade teacher, I watched my class take this year's ELA test on their chrome books. We were prepared on Wednesday to take the test and waited patiently for 40 minutes after our start time, before we were told the system was having difficulties. Can you imagine how 9 and 10 year olds felt after prepping and being ready to be told, we need to wait one more day?

Thursday came and although this day was multiple choice, with fewer questions than last year we were told, it took my class on the average, 3+ hours to complete. Was this supposed to be easier or less stressful? NO it was not!

— *Monroe County elementary school teacher*

As a third-grade teacher, I am saddened that the ELA knowledge of my 7 and 8-year-old students is evaluated by a computer-based test. Please, please consider having our youngest test-takers answer with paper and pencil, as they are accustomed to. Their keyboarding skills are in very early stages.

— *Tompkins County elementary school teacher*

Computer-based testing at face value sounds like a wonderful idea. However, students in fourth grade are not yet prepared for it. While reading a passage and answering multiple-choice questions is rather doable for these 8–10 year olds, writing responses on the computer is just beyond what they are able to do at this point. Many have not the skills to type out the extended responses needed.

— *Erie County elementary school teacher*

This year was a complete disaster!! After my kids sat at their desks for over an hour, they then had to sit for another 60 to 80 mins waiting to take the test on day one -- talk about mental and physical fatigue. Day 2—Tried again for an hour; test canceled.

Day 3—Got on after about 45 mins. Well, almost all got on. A couple of my students had to sit while we tried to figure out why they couldn't sign in.

— *Cortland County elementary school teacher*

In Washingtonville, NY, they tried the computerized version of the test and had trouble with the system. Testing became delayed because of system issues and children in fourth grade had to wait over the weekend to complete the test on Monday.

— *Orange County elementary school teacher*

We went through a roller coaster with the kids each day on whether the test would even work or not and this was very stressful for them! Eventually, it became a joke to many, as they celebrated not having to take due to “technical glitches”!

Then when they could actually take the test it was very distracting and we waited minutes for other kids to log in etc. ... administrators in and out of the room during testing as computers glitched and quit kids out! Who can focus or perform in this setting? Certainly not 9 and 10 year olds!

— *Onondaga County elementary school teacher*

These tests were absolutely horrible. Four to five hours a day in Yonkers with kids crying, weeping and falling asleep during the tests. Computers frozen, shutting down, PIN has to be entered many times. An aide and I constantly running around worried and the kids were not focused at all as they had to deal with this format. They were not comfortable typing and on Day two, the words were deleting and “wrapping” — this was a constant problem.

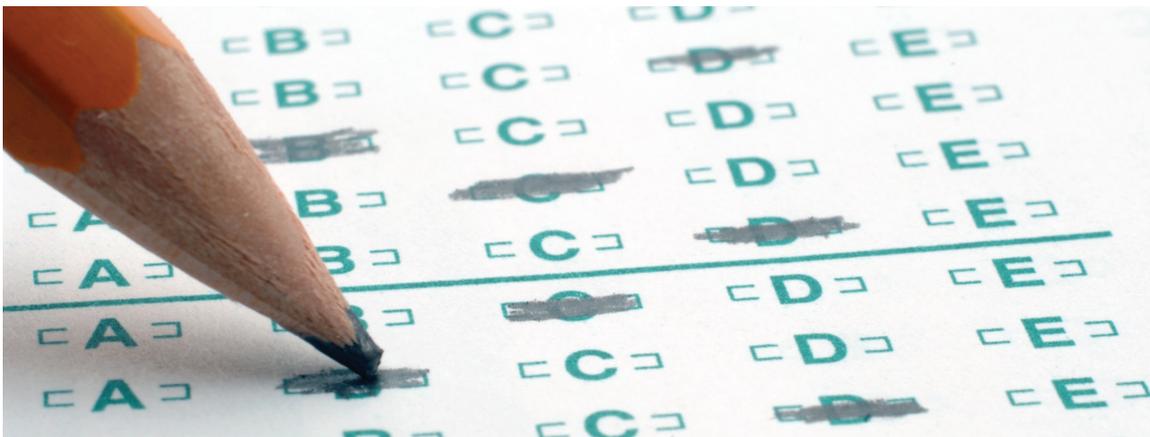
— *Westchester County elementary school teacher*

Because of the NYS ELA tests being given on the computer, my school, North Syracuse Junior High School, experienced a complete outage of Internet connectivity during one and a half school days. This prevented prepared lessons from taking place and students were unable to access or complete assignments through Google classroom. Students and staff were unable to use the NOVEL resources to research their assignments.

— Onondaga County middle school teacher

After working for a month with the students to practice test-taking skills, they had to put into action everything they have learned. Well, it was a flop. The passages were very difficult and the questions were difficult for many to understand. I had to dry tears, and honestly lie to them that everything would be ok. It wasn't ok. They all worked from 9 am until 2:15. Some were not even done then. Talk about making a struggling reader feel worthless. Students were upset and angry — angry to think that they might get in trouble for not doing well. Day two was much too long at each grade level. My third graders who struggle typing just quit working.

— Chautauqua County elementary school teacher



Excessive Testing Time

I'm a fourth-grade teacher and my students started the test at 9:45 a.m. and my last student finished at 3:10 p.m. Half my class was not finished by lunchtime. They were not allowed to have recess. **Many of them felt they were being punished because they were not finished ... the time to act is now. Put our children first!**

— Nassua County elementary school teacher

Some students took the entire school day to finish. That is unacceptable. Students taking Regents exams don't spend that long, with good reason ... There were students crying and even physically sick on day two due to the stress.

— Suffolk County middle school teacher

The length of time needed to complete day two of the testing was exorbitant. My students completed the paper format of the assessment. We began actually testing at 9:20 (after directions were done)... minimum testing time of 70 minutes (students were allowed to turn-in tests and read their own books beginning at 10:30).

After the initial 70 minutes, eight students were finished and another 10 students were not done. At 11:20 I had four students still not done and I began checking the hall for administration to be able to take them to the "overflow" location. We were scheduled for our special at 11:35. At this point the majority of my students had been reading their own

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books for over an hour. They were unable to get out of their seats, talk, eat, or freely use the restroom for more than two hours. At 11:45 I had three students who were not finished and who were escorted to the overflow room.

At 12:20 I took my class to lunch for their regularly scheduled time. After returning upstairs at about 12:30, another third-grade class was still in their testing session (they also eat at 12:20) and no one had taken the testers to overflow. The teacher was in tears about how hard this was on her students.

— *Suffolk County elementary teacher*

The state ELA tests were given a couple weeks ago. Although they are “shorter” and fewer days, they were still too extensive.

Some students who are hard workers and conscientious worked for several hours — four or more hours in some cases, missing recess with their peers, etc. This is far too long.

— *Fulton County elementary teacher*

I have taught for 24 years, mostly in third grade. What I experienced a few weeks ago during the ELA testing was abhorrent. Day one was incredibly long and arduous. The majority of my students had to return to the test after breaking for lunch in order to complete it. This was the very first time this has happened.

However, on day 2 of the test, I witnessed something I had NEVER seen before. My classroom of 8-year-old-children sat actively working through the test until lunch time (already over two hours), only to have to continue testing after a break to eat because they simply could not finish. This accounted for 16 children!! They were exhausted, stressed, and frustrated. They were literally visually and physically drained. Of those 16, 12 needed approximately 1.5 more hours to finish. There were two that sat and actively worked until 2 p.m. and two final children who ACTIVELY worked until 2:55 p.m.!

You don't have to be an educator to know that this is developmentally inappropriate, and ethically horrid. It was actually painful to watch. Your desire to design a fairer test by reducing it to two days instead of three has failed miserably. You ended up with a test that cannot and should not be supported educationally, emotionally and psychologically by anyone who works with and cares about children.

— *New York City elementary teacher*

I have been teaching for 25 years and proctored the 5th-grade test and ended up with three out of 26 kids in a room until 2:55. Six hours in a room with a one-hour lunch break was HORRIBLE — sad, sad, sad. Education should not consist of traumatizing kids while trying to assess basic academic knowledge.

— *Nassau County elementary teacher*

My biggest concern was the amount of writing students were expected to do on day two. The amount of time and focus needed to complete six short answer and one extended response was incredibly difficult for children (ages 9 to 10 years old) to sit, read, compose and revise. My students were sitting for approximately 90 to 120 minutes, some even longer. Students were concentrating on three different stories and seven different questions. You are not asking students to have writing stamina for one piece of writing, but to discuss many different ideas in one sitting. That is quite hard for a 10 year old.

It is developmentally inappropriate to have children sit for that period of time.

— *Rockland County elementary teacher*

Many students at my school took all day, that's six hours, to complete their test. Six passages is clearly still far too long.
— *New York City elementary teacher*

It took some of the general education fourth graders in my building many, many hours to take this test. I had three students still taking the test into their lunchtime, three and a half hours after it started. They had to be removed from my room to continue taking the test, with lunch, with several other students at a new location in the building. Two of my three finished after four hours. My last student finished at 3:20. The test started at 10 a.m. She wasn't the last student to finish in the school. Two fourth grade classes down the hall from me finished at 3:40 ... High school students are not given that much time to take their SATs.

— *Erie County elementary teacher*

Day two was far too long to be appropriate for third graders. The kids had to answer six short answer questions which needed to include two details to back up their answer. By the time the kids got to the extended response question, they were too worn out to do the work that they are capable of. After two hours, only a handful of my students were done. Six students did not complete the test by lunchtime, and had to continue in the afternoon. I am actually a teacher who supports the idea of state exams. I like that they keep me accountable to teaching the entire curriculum, and want other teachers to be held accountable as well. However, the public opinion around these exams is that they are inappropriate and some go as far as to say they are abuse to the children.

— *Dutchess County elementary teacher*

I thought the second day was really excessive in terms of the length of the test. As you know, there were seven short response questions and one extended response question. I proctored a class of 20 students (three others from the class took it in an alternate location) and of the 20, all took over two hours to finish. The first student finished at two hours and fifteen minutes. After three hours, eight of the 20 students were still taking the test. At that point they went to the auditorium to finish. A few of my students (not from the group I proctored) took four hours to finish.

I don't understand the purpose of giving such a lengthy test to seventh graders. It doesn't seem developmentally appropriate and I don't see who it benefits.

— *Westchester County middle school teacher*

Day Two of Grade 6 ELA was the most torturous ever in my 18 years of teaching in New York State. Nineteen students sat for the test. We started at 9 a.m. By 11 a.m. only two students were finished with the test. By 11:30, five students still needed to finish. These are students who do not have IEPs or a 504 — just regular ed. students. Some students with IEPs and 504s needed FOUR hours to complete the test! Some students just gave up at the end, and I don't blame them. The results from this test will mean nothing to teachers and school districts due to the harsh, unrealistic demands of stamina needed to complete it.

Would you want your child to endure this? As their teacher and one who deeply cares about my students, it was very difficult to watch them struggle through knowing that the expectations put on them by SED were out of reach.

— *Erie County middle school teacher*

I do not believe the data that is gathered from these tests warrants their use. The tests are too long, especially for the elementary students, and after the students have finished the tests, their effort and concentration for the rest of the school day suffers. Simply put, there has to be a more effective way to test our students' progress and achievement than these tests.

— *Albany County elementary teacher*

Friday, our second day of the test was unbelievable. A state test that was shortened by a day was in reality a test that combined test days two and three from the past years. It was filled with written questions that in the past would have been given over two days. Beginning the test at 9:30 in the morning, my last student finished the test at 3 p.m., with the average student in my class taking at least 4 1/2 hours to complete the exam. Again we are talking about 9 and 10-year-old students, who are working as hard as they can. This is not a special needs class; we are a regular education class. What were you thinking?

— *Monroe County elementary teacher*

I believe the test is still too long! We had students at our school taking the test all day and they were fully productive. By cramming in day 2 & 3 into one day's test, it made the test have too many passages and writing responses.

— *Erie County elementary teacher*

The tests were no better this year than they have been in previous years. They were just as inappropriately leveled as before. Instead of three-days' worth of testing in three days, we instead had three-days' worth of testing squeezed into two days. Our testing two-hour delay schedule had to be extended by 30 minutes on the first day to give students time to finish, and by an hour the second day (5.5 hours in total!); some students even continued testing for the rest of the school day until 3:30 p.m.! That's completely inappropriate, not only in the time it took, but also in the limited value of the data generated by these tests.

— *Broome County elementary teacher*

Dear Commissioner and Regents: Most of our elementary students spent three or more hours trying to complete Day Two of the ELA test. By the time they reached the extended response many did not have the stamina to write complete thoughtful answers. Squeezing a three-day test into two days to convince parents and teachers the exam was shorter was a disservice to our students.

— *Livingston County elementary teacher*

Not a single student in seventh grade was finished with day two within the suggested 90 minutes. We decided to extend the time in the exam room by another 25 minutes before moving students who needed additional time to the library or other secure location so classes could begin for other students. Over 50 percent of students in seventh grade needed the "extra" additional time. Many did not finish writing until about noon — that was over three hours of working. Two students worked right up until dismissal time in our building (2:50) and one of those students did not have time to write a conclusion.

— *Erie County elementary teacher*

Day two was not acceptable, in my opinion. No 9 or 10 year old should be spending HOURS on a test. Testing in my classroom began at 8:45 a.m. Not one of my students was finished in the 90 minutes it was expected to take. At 11:15 a.m., my students go to recess. This is two and a half hours into testing, obviously. I had nine students still working at this time. At 11:45, three hours in, I had seven students still working. At this time, students were hungry and mentally drained, as well as frustrated knowing their recess was over.

— *Steuben County elementary teacher*

The questions were ridiculously hard and the book two was too long. It took some of my students over three hours to complete. I urge you to look at these tests again. If they must be given, please realize these are 10-year-old children. An exam is supposed to test what you have learned, not frustrate and confuse you.

— *Erie County elementary teacher*

I am very concerned regarding the time frame in which it took third graders to complete this test. Some students sat for well over four hours... their stamina diminished quickly. Also, the length of this test was not suitable for third graders — developmentally inappropriate. I have taught for almost 25 years & I have never been more discouraged with the way we are assessing our children at this level. Please take this into consideration.

— Warren County elementary teacher

Developmentally Inappropriate

We watch our students suffer and bite our tongues because our voices are merely mocked and anything we say can and will be used against us. We console our crying students who have just felt a deep sense of failure and now don't even want to try. We try to think of responses to statements like, "I hate the state test. It makes me hate myself and reminds me how dumb I am."

— New York City elementary school teacher

I'm a fourth-grade teacher and my students started the test at 9:45 a.m. and my last student finished at 3:10 p.m. Half my class was not finished by lunchtime. They were not allowed to have recess. Many of them felt they were being punished because they were not finished ... the time to act is now. Put our children first!

— Nassau County elementary teacher

Some students took the entire school day to finish. That is unacceptable. Students taking Regents exams don't spend that long, with good reason ... There were students crying and even physically sick on day two due to the stress.

— Suffolk County middle school teacher

Students of varying abilities, backgrounds, and learning needs are forced to take an exam that caters to an elite 10 percent of students ... What is the purpose of this exam? In theory, the purpose is to test a student's reading comprehension, analytical writing, and essay writing abilities. The reality is that these exams merely test a student's endurance and stamina — how long can one sit there and physically write based on five different readings and prove themselves "worthy?"

— New York City elementary school teacher

My students asked me if they will find out what mistakes they made when they get their scores back. "No, you won't I replied." One little boy then spoke up to ask, "Well, then how can I know what I need to work on?" I looked at him and shook my head and praised him for being such a thoughtful thinker and suggested he write a letter himself to his government officials (we also learned about our government systems this year). I wish you could have witnessed his innocence and genuine concern that these tests do not provide him with anything useful after they are taken. That is wrong. After all, he and his peers sat for hours to take the tests and they don't get any useful feedback from them. In fact, I had to tell them that as their teacher, I don't get any useful feedback from them either.

— Suffolk County elementary teacher

The reading levels of the tests need to be brought down to the tested grade ... not stretched beyond. On the 2017 ELA test, half of the passages were beyond the third grade level. Please explain how that is really fair to my students who are taking an end of the year test before the end of the year and they are being assessed on passages one to two grade levels above their grade level.

— Suffolk County elementary teacher

The amount of writing expected of a 10 year old on the second day is developmentally inappropriate! As an adult, I'm not sure I would expect to write six 2-point responses and one 4-point response in one day. An adult without ADHD and without meds! Imagine a child with unmedicated ADHD? This is developmentally inappropriate!

Questions that make students flip back and forth over and over are not developmentally appropriate. Example: "Which paragraph best supports the theme suggested in paragraphs 1-6?" A). paragraph 12 B). paragraph 14 C). etc. So kids have to read 1-6, come up with the suggested theme, read paragraph 12 and figure out if that BEST supports the theme, read paragraph 14 and figure out if that BEST supports the theme, and then continue doing the same thing for the next two choices. And God forbid the kid has lost his or her train of thought and needs to RE-read any of the paragraphs 1-6 or choices. This is developmentally inappropriate.

Field test questions should not be imbedded. Some kids become frustrated and give up when something is too hard for them ... So a story that doesn't even count screws that kid out of their best effort for the rest of the test.

AGAIN - THEY ARE 10! Let's treat kids as we should. Follow guidelines by child psychologists and experts who know! AND let teachers talk! Let me read the test. Let me know what my kids were expected to do!

— *Fulton County elementary teacher*

As I was looking at some of the questions, I found I was confused by the vague ways the questions were posed and answering them became increasingly frustrating for 8-year-old children.

— *New York City elementary teacher*

To add on, the way some of the multiple choice and short response questions were worded was very complex and difficult to understand. The questions should be worded on an average fourth grade level. If the text is complex, and the responses will be graded to assess their level of comprehension, should the questions be complicated as well? Words should be chosen carefully; there was one particular question that was very poorly worded. Students are analyzing text, should they really need to interpret the meaning of the questions?

As a teacher we all know there is no such thing as a perfect lesson or presentation; feedback and revision is necessary to improve. That being said, I am asking you to review this test and assertively ask teachers for feedback. This test needs to address time, the type of task, and reading level of the questions.

— *Rockland County elementary teacher*

This year, I administered the ELA test to a student with learning disabilities. It was incredibly frustrating — how can we claim to differentiate when all students are forced to take a standardized test and instruction is geared toward the test? How is that helping students with disabilities? Why can't students and schools have an option to use portfolio-based assessment? The consortium of portfolio schools in NYC has some of the highest graduation rates in the city— why not extend that option to middle and elementary school?

The language on the test is deliberately abstract and confusing and seemed to not assess reading ability, but rather, whether students are able to do exactly one skill, which is refer back to a passage and understand exact wording in a specific context. This is not the only ELA skill worth measuring.

Many students at my school took all day, that's six hours, to complete their test. Six passages is clearly still far too long.

— *New York City elementary teacher*

Hi, I wish to register my protest to the developmental inappropriateness of the questions created for the sixth grade ELA test. These questions were far too focused on author's craft and analysis for children of this age group. The emphasis on these types of reading skills is turning the reading experience into a joyless, technical exercise, inappropriate for almost anyone.

— *Tompkins County middle school teacher*

Asking 8, 9 and 10 year olds to type answers to six short response questions and one essay is outright abusive. Paper and pencil testing would prove to be difficult as well. Squeezing the contents of a three-day test into two days is not making it shorter. My suggestion would be to eliminate one story and its questions on day two. I believe the skills we need to assess can be done within the parameters of 25 multiple-choice questions and three short responses and one essay. Make these tests "winnable" for the students taking them.

— *Niagara County elementary school teacher*

The multiple-choice questions are written to be purposely confusing. You can't find out what the children know when they can't decipher the question. In addition many of the multiple choice questions referring one paragraph to another are not appropriate for third through fifth graders. They just don't have the capacity to answer them. This includes the top-notch students ... I also have an issue with the scoring of the short response. It does not specifically say to make an inference in the question yet it's expected in the answer. This is absurd and if I did this in my classroom I would label it bad teaching/assessment.

— *Orange County elementary school teacher*

I truly think that these tests are developmentally inappropriate ... they simply should not have to read five passages and answer questions that have more than one correct answer. In addition to the inappropriate length of the exam, the questions are simply made to trick them. On day one there were a few questions I thought were fair but most I was unsure what the answer was because two answers were "good." As an adult, I didn't even have the patience to read and try every question. By number 12, I needed a break. Let's get some accurate data on our students instead of wasting hours of valuable teaching time.

— *Orange County elementary school teacher*

I'm writing about the second day of testing with the numerous writing passages. In all my years as an English teacher, I have never found such idiocy in testing! No practical teacher would ever give an 11-year-old child that many short response questions and an entire essay all in one sitting. This makes me question whether or not our folks in State Ed. have lost touch or ever had touch at all with children in the classroom!

— *Erie County middle school teacher*

Although the state estimates that each test session should take students about an hour, students often spend much longer on the ELA test, particularly day two with extensive writing demands. On the second day of the test, all students spent 2 1/2 hours either testing or sitting still in a testing environment waiting for others to finish.

Other students continued taking the test in another location after a lunch break. Some spent upwards of four hours on the test during the day. One father said that his son told him he spent five hours on the test but answered only one question. Child development resources indicate that, at most, a child of this age has an attention span of an hour. (Many have shorter attention spans than an hour.)

— *Tompkins County elementary school teacher*

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I was appalled to realize instead that what had been a three-day test, was now converted into a two-day test with little to no editing. I have been privy to many stories of children taking a FULL school day to take this test. Is this what you deem as a reasonable test-taking practice for an 8 year old? I do not.

— Cattaraugus County elementary school teacher

This round of testing was very difficult for my students. My students have language difficulties; English is their second language because they are deaf. Many of them do well with English but plenty of them do not. I have eighth grade students who read and write four to five years below grade level. To give them a test at eighth grade level is torture, unhelpful and frankly a waste of time.

— Monroe County elementary school teacher

Day 2 of the exam was horrible. Half of my room of 8 year olds spent over 90 minutes on the exam. This is a ridiculous expectation. They are not developmentally ready for that kind of rigor. Many adults aren't!

— Rensselaer County elementary school teacher

My opinion is that the NYS ELA test was WAY too long. These third graders are too young to have to sit and write for that long. We started the test at 9 a.m. My FIRST student was finished after 2 hours and 15 minutes ... my last after 4 hours. Six short answers and one extended response is too much for an 8-year-old child to have to write in ONE day. Please consider reducing the AMOUNT of writing that this age group has to do in one day. I even had one of my students fall asleep for 45 minutes after taking the test because she "was exhausted."

— Saratoga County elementary school teacher

Although the number of questions has been reduced, the number of days was also reduced. This made the students quite stressed as they still had the same amount of work per day. The readings that were chosen the first day were quite difficult and the questions were worded in a confusing manner.

— New York City elementary school teacher

This year's test was totally unacceptable. I want to be clear that I am not opposed to testing, but this year's was all inferential questioning. In the one that I looked at there did not appear to be any explicit question. They were all higher-level advanced questions. Totally developmentally inappropriate.

— Rockland County elementary school teacher

This year's state tests were a complete disaster. They are too long and developmentally inappropriate. Children should not be spending the majority of the day trying to complete a single — test. Some even having to test into a third day just to complete. Did you at any point in your professional career spend that many hours just trying to complete a portion of a test? Did you at 8 years old?

— Jefferson County elementary school teacher

The tests this year, as with every other year are an absolute disaster. To put students with disabilities through tests such as these is a sin. Students with disabilities NEED TO BE EXEMPT from state tests.

— Suffolk County elementary school teacher

The test on day two was tricky for fourth graders, in that it required quite a bit of inference on the part of the students in order to correctly and thoroughly answer the extended response questions. Also, the test's time setting was in a period likely very unfamiliar to the average fourth grader.

— *Nassau County elementary school teacher*

My students started the day two test at approximately 8:30 a.m. At 10, I had exactly two of 30 students who finished. An hour later, 14 of these students were still testing. But that was nothing—many of my students worked upwards of four and a half hours just to complete the test.

Worst of all, two young girls spent the entire day trying to complete it — 8:30 a.m. to 2:40 p.m., with a 40-minute lunch break. Those two girls did not even finish the test — we actually had to stop them and tell them they had to submit, even though their essays weren't finished. They were confused and upset and asked us after working so hard, how is it fair that we have to submit before we finish?

When compared to the Regents exam — the exam that students need to pass to graduate high school — why are there more reading passages, more multiple choice questions, more short response questions, and the same one essay for students in grades 5 –12?

— *Sullivan County elementary school teacher*

My concern comes with the appropriateness of 8 through 11 year olds sitting at a computer taking a test literally from 9:20-3:00 with only a 1/2 hour to eat lunch. Third graders are still developing. They are not practiced in keyboarding. I would argue that some of them don't have hands big enough to even keyboard with two hands.

Therefore, it was five hours of hunt and peck. The writing that they are asked to do on these tests goes against writing specialists such as Fletcher "6+writing Traits". Responding to questions with no regard for student engagement is the worst kind of teaching. This type of testing goes against all that I know as good teaching from my National Board Certification process. I can't even use these tests to drive the instruction.

— *Onondaga County elementary teacher*



Blood, Sweat and Tears

It's 2 p.m. on the second day of testing. There are still students in front of me, trying to finish an exam that is apparently designed to be able to be completed in less than two hours.

It's 2:15 p.m. Students are crying because they have to go home and cannot finish their exams.

It's the following day. Students are anxious, worrying about what their futures look like because they did their best and their best still was not good enough in the eyes of the New York State English Exam.

— *New York City elementary school teacher*

Some students took the entire school day to finish. That is unacceptable. Students taking Regents exams don't spend that long, with good reason ... There were students crying and even physically sick on day two due to the stress.

— *Suffolk County middle school teacher*

One teacher was in tears about how hard this was on her students ... two of her students had been crying, at separate times, during the testing session about being hungry and missing snack.

— *Suffolk County elementary teacher*

... One of my students has anxiety and pulls his hair out; he has two very large bald patches on either side of the back of his head. He had been stuck on a question in the classroom and while he knew he could skip it and move on, every time I checked on him he was either still staring at that question or looking at a passage.

I went into the overflow room and he was sitting staring at the test booklet. He was on the same question he was on in my classroom over two hours prior. He had either read everything and couldn't come up with any answers or he hadn't moved on. Almost all of his test booklet was blank (I noticed writing on one question). I told him he had worked hard enough and could rejoin the class upstairs ... he was very defeated when he walked out of the testing room. I also noticed that his head appeared more bald and he had red scratches in his favorite picking spot. This child sitting for the entire day, facing a test he was overwhelmed by, was child abuse.

—*Suffolk County elementary teacher*

I taught on Long Island for 36 years. My daughter and son-in-law are SUNY Albany graduates, with additional post-graduate degrees. My son-in-law is an educator. This sad story is about my loving wonderful grandson who is 9 years old, a third-grader on Long Island.

This year, we have watched a child go from a happy, confident child to a child who is pulled out of class for extra reading and math, in addition to speech therapy! His parents also pay for a tutor weekly at their home... The amount of stress from the prep work and homework he has is unbelievable. Every book says "common core." The work is at a fifth plus grade level, which is ridiculous, especially for a child who all these extra support services several times a week, with little success.

He has developed a nervous habit of licking his lips, obviously his coping mechanism. His lips are raw and he continually puts Vaseline on them to take away the pain, but they continue to bleed from him also biting his lip. He developed a significant stutter which has progressively worsened as the amount of work increased ... He is very hard on himself

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and calls himself a loser ... His parents took my advice to opt-out of the testing. When my daughter brought the letter into his school to notify them, she was informed by the principal to make sure he had a book with him on those dates because he'd have to sit absolutely quiet for 5 hours! Ridiculous!

My solution to them was to keep him home on test days. That's what they did. Is this what these tests are evaluating? **How much a child can endure until they break? ... This damage is irreversible for my grandson. It angers and saddens me that he doesn't have the love for learning my family has always shared. I have to endure watching my beloved grandson suffer on a daily basis.**

— Nassau County retired educator and grandparent

Perhaps NY should spend \$\$\$ looking into the sharp increase in students with anxiety issues since this common core and horrid testing. I've taught 29 years and never before have I had so many children anxious and stressed. Also absenteeism is way up since these wonderful changes have taken place. Please wake up!!!!

— Orange County elementary educator

I am so disappointed in how the day two ELA test went this year. We put teachers in a horrible, ethical position. They could either have their students do poorly on the session two test and pull the test, or they could allow students to test for five hours. Third grade students tested from 9:30-12:30, took a break and tested from 1-3 p.m. They were crying because even after all that time they didn't finish the test!

Please, I felt like we were torturing our students with session two! The unlimited time has become a curse and the three days down to two turned out to be three days anyway in regards to how long it took to complete.

— Tioga County elementary educator

Some of the observations I had while administering the test made me cringe. I had 8-and 9-year-old students in tears during the second day of the test. This section was TOO long. Some students took more than four hours to complete the six short answers and one extended response question. I had students asking to see the social worker or the nurse due to anxiety and stomach aches. This is unacceptable.

— Saratoga County elementary educator



To our fearless educational leaders that have never taught before:

What a disaster your tests are. They made little kids cry. The questions are pathetic. YOU are all pathetic. And I will start voting for state legislators that WILL GET YOU OUT unless you cease and desist these awful tests immediately. The public has spoken. Get rid of the tests or we will get rid of YOU.

— Delaware County elementary educator

Day 2 of the Grade 3 ELA Test was nothing but abuse. It was a two-day test crammed into one day essentially ... My students worked productively for about 45 minutes. That's when the distress began ... three of my students complained of bellyaches and went to the bathroom multiple times. One ended up in the nurse for an hour. Then came the tears. Three of my students in the same half hour started crying. Exact quotes were "it's too hard," "I feel like I'm never going to finish," "I don't understand what to do..." quotes coming from some of my best readers ... There were 3rd graders in my school who tested from 200-300 minutes!! That is abuse and as a teacher of 15 years, I am disgusted by what occurred.

— Westchester County elementary educator

Day two was a total nightmare and day one was just slightly more bearable! Most adults can't sit and test for one to two hours without struggling! My 4th graders worked for HOURS... all but three kids worked through their lunch, which was two hours into testing ... several worked close to three hours and a few poor kids (one being a top notch student) worked four hours!!! I literally felt like I was a child abuser! They sat biting nails, begging to go to nurse, breathing heavily and staring at me in hopes it would stop! **This is WRONG! Who is this helping? Not the kids.**

— Onondaga County elementary school teacher

On the first day of testing, I watched students finish early and struggle to remain still and quiet, some with over an hour to wait.

On the second day I watched as administration had to keep extending testing time because of the large numbers of students still not finished after the 90 min allotted time. Finally after over two hours, those students who still did not finish were herded to a room where many took another three hours to finish. None were allowed to break to eat.

I watched several seventh-grade boys break down and cry — and other students just watch numbly because they knew the misery of the test.

— Chemung County middle school teacher

This year's tests were again an exercise in child abuse. Children testing for hours is NOT okay! And crashing servers? Shame on all of you who are supposed to be about the children. This is anything but about the children.

— Nassau County parent



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