

Discussion Paper: First Year Results (2013-2014) from the New Common Core Algebra and ELA Regents Exams Warrant a Public Response from the New York State Education Department

By David Rubel

www.davidrubelconsultant.com

Summary: One of the big questions with the transition to the Common Core Learning Standards in New York State is how well students will do on the new Common Core Regents Exams in Math and English. While most of the focus has been on the college readiness test scores of a 75 in English and 80 in Math (which don't go into effect until 2022), very little attention has been given to students that must attain a 65 or higher test score on the new Algebra 1 and English Common Core Regents exams. Last June, most ninth grade high school students were required by the New York State Education Department (NYSED) to take the new Common Core Algebra 1 Exam with option of also taking the Integrated Algebra Exam (only the higher score would count for graduation purposes).

- **During the first six months of 2014, NYSED undertook a very rigorous test development process for both the new Common Core Algebra 1 and ELA exams.** A 119 page report *New York State Regents Examination in Algebra I (Common Core) And English Language Arts (Common Core) Standard Setting Technical Report February 2015 (and several other NYSED publications documented the process)* describes in detail every step taken to develop the new tests and the scoring. One of the main objectives of the test development process was to maintain a similar student passing rate (a score of 65 or higher) from the Regents Integrated Algebra exam to the new Common Core Algebra 1 exam.
- **What we know now and what we are waiting on from NYSED:** The currently available NYSED data offers an important snapshot of the results of the first year. However, available data does not allow for a full analysis. Regents results are provided annually based on all three administrations (June, August and January). First time test takers are mixed with test re-takers. Statewide, **266,172** students took the Integrated Algebra Exam and **170,688** students took the Common Core Algebra Exam. NYSED should issue its own report with a comparison of passing scores for first time test takers for the Integrated Algebra and Common Core Algebra 1 exam. Test re-takers also need a separate comparison; this data will not be available until 2016.
- **2013-14 Test results:** Last June, high school students took both the new Common Core Algebra 1 exam and the Integrated Algebra exam. ***Statewide, the change was small; there was only a 4% drop in the Common Core Algebra 1 test score passing rate from the Integrated Algebra.*** However, the available data shows that for many New York City-Department of Education (NYC-DOE) school districts the test score results between the Integrated Algebra and the Common

Core Algebra 1 exam were not similar or comparable but instead significantly different. **Six New York City school districts saw a drop of 15% to 22% in the number of students receiving a passing score.**

- **Students with a Disability, English Language learners and Economically Disadvantaged students all saw a big drop in their passing rate:** For the Integrated Algebra and the Common Core Algebra 1 exam, Special Education, English Language Learners and Economically Disadvantaged students saw larger drops for a passing score on the new Common Core Algebra 1 Regents exam. It is possible that some of these students will retake the test in August or January and get passing score.
 - The statewide number of Students with Disabilities receiving a passing score on the Common Core Algebra 1 exam dropped by 11%.**
 - The statewide number of English Language Learner students receiving a passing score on the Common Core Algebra 1 exam dropped by 24%.**
 - The statewide number of Economically Disadvantaged students receiving a passing score on the Common Core Algebra 1 exam dropped by 10%.**
- **Serious concerns with NYSED methodology used for setting the test scores:** One big concern for the phase in of the Common Core Regents Exams is that three groups, students with a disability, English language learners and Economically Disadvantaged, were undercounted in the methodology used by NYSED to set the test scores on the Common Core Algebra 1 exam (see #5). In the methodology used by NYSED for setting the passing score for the Common Core Algebra 1 exam, only students from a typical June administration were used. If annual test takers (August, January and June) had been the basis for the methodology, then the composition of the various student population groups would have been very different. Instead, Students with a Disability were undercounted by 28% of their actual total, English language learners were undercounted by 39% of their actual total, and Economically Disadvantaged students were undercounted by 15.6% of their actual total. Also, the annual number of test takers is much higher than just the June administration. Thousands of test re-takers were not included in the NYSED methodology (an average of 32,356 from the past three years). If these students had been included in the test score setting methodology, would the difficulty of passing the test remain the same? **NYSED should provide an explanation as to why using the June administration was better for the score setting methodology than using the total number of annual test takers.**
- **Are all New York State high school students ready for the June 2016 Common Core only Regents tests:** If more students are going to struggle to achieve a passing score of 65 on the Regents Algebra 1 and ELA exams, will this cause a decrease in Regent Diploma graduation rates? Will NYSED and NYC-DOE ramp up efforts to help special education and English Language Learner students succeed with the Common Core Regents classes and exams? Based on the results from the 2013-14 Regents Exams, NYSED should provide its own analysis to determine if all high school students are ready for Common Core Phase.

2013-14 School Year Regents Exams Results for New York State and New York City High Schools

“The Department intends to maintain a zero to 100 point scale and distinct performance standards (or cut scores) that are comparable to the current 65 Regents Exam cut score for graduation purposes (Performance Level 3) and an aspirational college- and career-readiness cut score (Performance Level 4). As a result, we expect that the percentage of students passing (for graduation purposes) the new Common Core Regents Exams will likely be similar to the pass rates on existing Regents Exams at a score of 65.” Source: NYSED Setting Performance Standards: Common Core Regents Exams in Algebra I and ELA, June 2014

1. **Statewide, for the transition from the Regents Integrated Algebra exam to the new Common Core Algebra 1 exam, there was only a small drop in the passing rate for the all students group:** Across New York State, a total of 266,172 students (general and students with disabilities) took the Integrated Algebra Regents Exam. 170,688 students took the new Common Core Algebra 1 Regents Exam. There was only a small drop of 4%, from 72% to 68%, in the statewide number of students passing the new Common Core Regents Algebra 1 Math test (compared with the number of students passing the Integrated Algebra Regents exam). The New York State School Report Card data (<https://reportcards.nysed.gov/>) available from NYSED does not allow for a full comparison between passing rates on the old and new Regents. The Integrated Algebra group includes both first time test takers and 10th, 11th or 12th graders who failed the test the first time and are retaking it (for a second, third, fourth or more time). The test re-taker group did not have to take the Common Core Regents Algebra 1 Exam. The breakout comparison between first time test takers will offer a fuller analysis of the changes in passing rates between the Integrated Algebra and Common Core Algebra 1 exam. The test re-taker group is equally important. We will not know the full passing rate for all test takers (including test re-takers) until a year from now when the Common Core Algebra 1 test is the only one allowed to be taken. NYSED should have the relevant data and provide its own analysis of how the two groups of first time test takers did.

2013-14 School Year Regents Algebra Exam Results

Results by Student Group	Integrated Algebra	% Passing Score 65 or Higher		Common Core Algebra 1	% Passing Score Level 3 or Higher
All Students	266,172	72		170,688	68

The chart below shows the new scoring system for the Common Core Regents Exams. The 0 to 100 point system has been changed to a 1 to 5 scoring system.

NYSED Performance Levels on Common Core Regents Exams	Recommended Scale Score Range
Level 5: Exceeds Common Core expectations	85-100
Level 4: Meets Common Core expectations (First required for Regents Diploma purposes with the Class of 2022)	74-84
Level 3: Partially meets Common Core expectations (Required for current Regents Diploma purposes. We expect comparable percentages of students to attain Level 3 or above as do students who pass current Regents Exams (2005 Standards) with a score of 65 or above)	65-73
Level 2 (Safety Net): Partially meets Common Core expectations (Required for Local Diploma purposes. We expect comparable percentages of students to attain Level 2 or above as do students who pass current Regents Exams (2005 Standards) with a score of 55 or above)	55-64
Level 1: Does not demonstrate Knowledge and Skills for Level 2	0-54

Source: New York State Regents Examination in Algebra I (Common Core) and English Language Arts (Common Core) Standard Setting Technical Report. February 2015. And Setting Performance Standards: Common Core Regents Exams in Algebra I and ELA Board of Regents June 23, 2014

- In New York City, the same transition from the Integrated Algebra to the Common Core Regents Algebra 1 Exam had very mixed results.** For the 32 New York City school districts, the test comparison results varied significantly across the City. Some school districts had 20% less students passing the Common Core Algebra exams while for other school districts the drop was around 5%. For some school districts that already had large numbers of students failing the Regents Exam, the new Common Core exam is increasing the failure rate. ***For the Integrated Algebra Regents Exam (old), two school districts had less than 50% of students passing. For the new Common Core Algebra Regents exam, 13 school districts had less than 50% of students passing.*** While NYSED said the change from the old to new exam would yield “similar” or “comparable” results, a 20% drop cannot be considered as similar. Since these figures are based only on the June administration, it is possible that some/many of the students will pass the test in August or January (since many students did not take the Common Core Algebra Exam, when full results are in, it is also possible that the drop will be larger). The uncertainty underscores the importance of NYSED conducting its own analysis and making it public. The chart below shows a comparison of student test takers for the Integrated Algebra exam (test version in use since 2005) and new Common Core Algebra 1 exam:

NYC-DOE Schools:

2013-14 Comparison of Integrated Algebra and Common Core Algebra 1 Regents Scores

(all students: general education and students with disabilities)

School District	Integrated Algebra % Students Passing Exam	Common Core Algebra 1 % Students Passing Exam	% Change More/Less Students Passing
01	73	74	1
02	65	56	-9
03	68	69	1
04	73	65	-8
05	56	44	-12
06	57	46	-11
07	57	37	-20
08	47	38	-9
09	57	44	-13
10	60	43	-17
11	58	37	-21
12	58	40	-18
13	61	55	-6
14	59	46	-13
15	67	61	-6
16	39	17	-22
17	62	51	-11
18	67	56	-11
19	52	34	-18
20	81	86	5
21	70	57	-13
22	76	75	-1
23	54	49	-5
24	72	70	-2
25	70	67	-3
26	79	76	-3
27	64	56	-8
28	72	66	-6
29	59	53	-6
30	70	67	-3
31	72	66	-6
32	53	48	-5

Source: 2013-14 NYSED School Report Cards for NYC DOE School Districts

Explanation of data: The second column shows the highest score for an individual test taker. This column includes students who failed the test the first time and are retaking the test in 10th, 11th or 12th grade. "Annual Regents examination results include those from August, January, and June of the reporting year. If a student takes the same Regents examination multiple times during the reporting year, only the highest score is included in the annual results." Source: NYSED Report

Card. The third column is only first time Common Core Algebra 1 Regents test takers (mostly 9th graders). For a fuller comparison to be made between the two exams, NYSED would have to break out the Integrated Algebra test takers from first time and test re-takers. We also have to wait another year to see how the test re-taker group does on the Common Core Algebra 1 Exam when they take the test for a second or more time.

3. Students with disabilities had much bigger drop in passing scores in the Regents

Common Core Algebra 1 test than general education students: 16.6% of all students taking the Algebra Regents test are students with a disability. One of the big concerns with the transition to the Common Core is that students with disabilities will have more difficulty passing the required Common Core Regents Exams (Algebra, Geometry and ELA) necessary for graduation (otherwise these students will have to graduate with a local diploma). For the Integrated Algebra Exam, 41% of students with disabilities scored a 65 or higher. For the new Common Core Algebra 1 exam, 30% of the students with disabilities group scored the equivalent of a 65 or higher (under the new scoring system a Level 3 is equivalent to a 65 score). This means that the statewide total number of students with disabilities receiving a passing Regents score dropped by 11%. NYSED should offer data showing the break out of the figures between first time test takers and test re-takers.

2013-14 School Year Regents Algebra Exam Results

Results by Student Group	Integrated Algebra Test Takers	% Passing Score 65 or Higher		Common Core Algebra	% Passing Score 65/Level 3 or Higher
All Students	266,172	72		170,688	68
General Education Students	221,754	78		151,121	74
Students with disabilities	44,418	41		19567	30

4. English Language Learner students saw a big drop in the Algebra 1 Regents Exam

passing rate: Last year, a statewide total of 23,732 students English Language Learner (ELL) took the Integrated Algebra Exam. For the Integrated Algebra Exam, **50%** of ELL students scored a 65 or higher. For the new Common Core Algebra 1 exam, **26%** of the ELL students scored the equivalent of a 65 or higher (only 9,659 LEP students took this test). This means that the statewide total number of ELL students receiving a passing Algebra Regents score dropped by 25%. NYSED should offer data showing the break out of the figures between first time test takers and test re-takers.

2013-14 School Year Regents Algebra Exam Results

Results by Student Group	Integrated Algebra Test Takers	% Passing Score 65 or Higher		Common Core Algebra 1 Test Takers	% Passing Score 65/Level 3 or Higher
All Students	266,172	72		170,688	68
General Education Students	221,754	78		151,121	74
English Language Learners	23,732	50		9,659	26

Note: For English Language Learner NYSED Report uses the term "Limited English Proficiency".

- 5. Economically Disadvantaged students saw a significant drop in the Algebra 1 Regents Exam passing rate:** For the Integrated Algebra Exam, **64%** of Economically Disadvantaged students (defined as participating in the Free Lunch Program or other government benefit program) scored a 65 or higher. For the new Common Core Algebra 1 exam, **54%** of the Economically Disadvantaged students scored the equivalent of a 65 or higher. This means that the statewide total number of Economically Disadvantaged students receiving a passing Algebra Regents score dropped by 10%. NYSED should offer data showing the break out of the figures between first time test takers and test re-takers.

2013-14 School Year Regents Algebra Exam Results

Results by Student Group	Integrated Algebra Test Takers	% Passing Score 65 or Higher		Common Core Algebra 1 Test Takers	% Passing Score 65/Level 3 or Higher
Economically Disadvantaged	149,874	64		80,974	54
Not Economically Disadvantaged	116,298	83		89,714	83

- 6. Serious concern with the methodology NYSED used for the test score setting for Common Core Algebra 1 and ELA exams:**

“After careful consideration of the nature of the new examinations, the rigor of the new curricula, the transitional and aspirational aspects of the State policy directives, and the role of the assessment in student learning throughout high school and beyond, the standard setting committees made recommendations on the cut scores to the Commissioner of Education. The Commissioner accepted the recommendations of the standard setting panelists. The approved cut scores were provided to the NYSED’s scaling and equating contractor for implementation within the scale of measurement used to report student performance on the New York State Regents Examinations.” New York State Regents Examination in Algebra I (Common Core) and English Language Arts (Common Core) Standard Setting Technical Report. February 2015. Prepared for NYSED by Data Recognition Corporation.

This section is an in depth discussion of the methodology used by NYSED for setting the scores for the Common Core Algebra 1 Regents Exam. The purpose of the methodology was to ensure that test scores would remain comparable between the old and new Regents exams. A key part of the

methodology is a sampling of student test scores on the new exam. In the NYSED Standard Setting Technical Report February 2015, the committee in charge of setting the scoring for the Algebra 1 and ELA Common Core Regents Exam used a student population based on a typical June administration of the test for part of their methodology.

Sample vs. Population Summary, Algebra 1

	Population		Sample (10919 Students)			
	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	Pct. Diff	
ETHNICITY	Asian	20601	8.3	850	7.8	-0.5
	Black	48078	19.4	2179	20.0	0.5
	Hispanic	58455	23.6	2492	22.8	-0.8
	American Indian / Native	1224	0.5	30	0.3	-0.2
	Multiracial	2258	0.9	63	0.6	-0.3
	Pacific Islander	521	0.2	17	0.2	-0.1
	White	116370	47.0	5288	48.4	1.4
LANGUAGE	Chinese	58	0.0			
	English	247049	99.8	10912	99.9	0.1
	Haitian Creole	14	0.0			
	Korean	5	0.0			
	Russian	16	0.0	1	0.0	0.0
	Spanish	365	0.1	6	0.1	-0.1
ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER (ELL)	N	229462	92.7	10334	94.6	1.9
	Y	18045	7.3	585	5.4	-1.9
NEED/RESOURCE CAPACITY	High Need: New York City	87207	35.2	3938	36.1	0.8
	High Need: Large Cities	9754	3.9	385	3.5	-0.4
	High Need: Urban/Suburban	16914	6.8	712	6.5	-0.3
	High Need: Rural	11954	4.8	439	4.0	-0.8
	Average Need	65207	26.3	3093	28.3	2.0
	Low Need	33980	13.7	1581	14.5	0.8
	Charter School	4374	1.8	195	1.8	0.0
	Non-Public School	18117	7.3	576	5.3	-2.0
POVERTY	N	127955	51.7	5729	52.5	0.8
	Y	119552	48.3	5190	47.5	-0.8
GENDER	F	123720	50.0	5537	50.7	0.7
	M	123787	50.0	5382	49.3	-0.7
STUDENT WITH DISABILITIES	N	216026	87.3	9620	88.1	0.8
	Y	31481	12.7	1299	11.9	-0.8

Source: New York State Regents Examination in Algebra I (Common Core) and English Language Arts (Common Core) Standard Setting Technical Report. February 2015. Prepared by Data Recognition Corporation.

“Data used to support these meetings were obtained from representative samples of students who had been administered the Regents exams immediately prior to the standard setting meetings. The samples were drawn to be representative of the typical population taking these Regents exams during a June administration.

A preliminary sample was identified, using test enrollment data with a series of stratification values that included: gender, ethnicity, English language learner (ELL) status, student with disabilities (SWD) status, socio-economic status, need/resource capacity (NRC) category, and previous performance on the applicable Regents Examination (i.e., Integrated Algebra or Comprehensive English). Schools identified as being included in the sample received different answer documents for expedited processing by DRC. Some minor adjustments to the preliminary sample were made to account for differences between enrollment information and actual test administrations.

Summary statistics for the sample versus the population of a typical June administration, June 2013 in this case, are reported in Tables 7 and 8 for Algebra I and English language arts, respectively. Note the differences between the sample selected and the typical populations taking the Regents exams are negligible, suggesting that the information presented to standard setting panelists was well estimated.” Source: NYSED Standard Setting Technical Report February 2015, prepared by Data Recognition Corporation

To ensure that the sampling used for the test score setting was based on an accurate Regents test population, NYSED chose to base its sampling on a typical June Regents Test administration. The concern here is that the Regents Exams are administered in August and January too. It is quite possible that these two test dates have higher concentrations of English Language learners and Students with a Disability than the June administration. If they do, then that information would call into the question using just the June administration for the Common Core test score setting purposes. For example, just comparing the statewide results for the 2013-2014 Integrated Algebra Exam, the % number of students with a disability, English Language Learners and Economically Disadvantaged groups is significantly higher than the sampling figures used by NYSED test development team. Also, the annual number of test takers is much higher than just the June administration. Thousands of test re-takers were not included in the NYSED methodology (an average of 32,356 from the past three years). If the test re-taker students had been included in the test score setting methodology, would the difficulty of passing the test remain the same?

In **Chart 6-1** below, the data offers a comparison of the NYSED test sampling group with the actual number of test takers based on 2013-14 Regents Exam results for integrated Algebra. Chart 6-1 shows that there was a very large number of students from at risk groups (mainly students with disabilities and English language learners) that were not represented in the NYSED test development sampling. Their counterparts, general education and English proficient students, were over represented.

Chart 6-1. Comparison of NYSED Test Sampling Group vs 2013-14 Algebra Regents Test Takers

	% Sample Population NYSED Test Development (Algebra 1)	Actual % Number 2013-2014 Integrated Algebra Regents Test Takers	% Difference	% of 2013-14 SWD and ELL Test Takers not factored into the NYSED Common Core Score Setting
Students with Disabilities	<u>11.9%</u>	<u>16.6%</u>	<u>4.7</u>	28.3%
English Language Learners	<u>5.4</u>	<u>8.9%</u>	<u>3.5</u>	39.3%
Economically Disadvantaged	<u>47.5%</u>	<u>56.3%</u>	<u>8.8</u>	15.6%

Source and explanation: Column 2 data comes from the New York State Regents Examination in Algebra I (Common Core) and English Language Arts (Common Core) Standard Setting Technical Report. February 2015. Prepared by Data Recognition Corporation.

Column 3 data comes from the NYSED Report Card 2013-14. Column 4 is the difference between Column 2 and 3. Column 4 is the percentage difference. Column 5 is the percentage of the total number of each group that were left out of the sampling used by NYSED. For actual numbers go to page 10.

An analysis of the data in Chart 6-1, shows the following:

- ***If NYSED had used the annual figures of the Integrated Algebra Regent Test Takers (the data found on the NYSED Report Card system), instead of just a typical June administration, a total of 513 more students with disabilities, 386 more English Language Learners, and 957 more Economically Disadvantaged students would have been part of the 10,919 Sample Test Takers that were used to set the test scores for the Common Core Algebra 1 Regents Exam.***
- ***Just as students from at risk groups were under represented, stronger test taking students were over represented.***
- ***If the additional students from these at risk three groups were represented, based on their actual number of test takers, the NYSED Common Core Algebra 1 test score setting most likely would have been different and more reflective of their more representative mix of right and wrong answers. If NYSED conducts another sampling, this time based on actual numbers of test taker groups, the mix of difficult questions and test score setting can be revised for future Regent Exam administrations.***

Actual numbers of students affected:

The **Chart 6-2** below shows that there are thousands more students that take the Regents annually than just in June. These students were not counted in the NYSED score setting methodology. In the second column, are the numbers of students taking the test based on the actual % in the NYSED test development. The percentages for students with a disability and English Language Learners dropped a little bit between the typical June administration and the sampling. For English language learner the drop went from 7.3% to 5.4%. So, to arrive at numbers of students affected, not just percentage figures, the percentage from the sampling was used with the population figures for a typical June administration. Within the three groups, there is overlap. A student with a disability can also be an English Language Learner and/or low income. So the number cannot be added in total.

Chart 6-2

	Typical June Administration for the NYSED Test Development (Algebra 1)	Actual Number 2013-2014 Integrated Algebra Regents Test Takers	Number of 2013-14 Test Takers not factored into the NYSED Common Core Score Setting
General Education	218,053	221,754	-3701
Students with Disabilities	29,453	44,418	-14,965
English Proficient	234,141	242,440	-8,299
English Language Learners	13,365	23,732	-10,367
Not Economically Disadvantaged	129,941	116,298	13,643
Economically Disadvantaged/ Poverty	117,656	149,874	-32,218

Source and explanation: Column 2 data comes from the New York State Regents Examination in Algebra I (Common Core) and English Language Arts (Common Core) Standard Setting Technical Report. February 2015. Prepared by Data Recognition Corporation. Column 3 data comes from the NYSED Report Card 2013-14. Column 4 is the difference between Column 2 and 3.

Chart 6-2 shows that thousands of students were not included in the test development methodology for the score setting.

14,965 students with disabilities and 10,367 English language learner students were not factored in the test score setting methodology.

Test re-takers:

If the objective is to maintain consistency in passing rates, then two groups of test takers deserve equal consideration in the design of the methodology: first time test takers and test re-takers. In addition to the June administration, the Regents Exams also have an August and January administration. The NYSED sampling is based only on students that took the test in June. If NYSED conducted another sampling with all three administrations, it is quite possible that the test scores would be different from the scores that came from the sampling.

Also, test re-takers are students that failed the test and are retaking the test a second, third or more time. The NYSED annual reporting data only shows one score for a test taker. This data does not capture the difficulty a student may be having in passing the test. Here is an explanation from the NYC-DOE **School Quality Guide Educator Guide High Schools 2013-14** Last Updated: January 20, 2015

Rules for including / excluding exams passed in 2013-14

- The exam is included if it is the first time the student passed the exam.
- The exam is excluded if the student has already passed the same exam at an earlier date.

□ If a student passes both a Regents exam and a Regents alternative in the same subject in the same school year, the Regents exam is excluded because the Regents alternative is always worth the same or more points.

Rules for including / excluding exams failed in 2013-14

□ Failed exam results are excluded if the student passed or passes any exam in the same subject (or the same exam) either in the same year or a previous year.

□ If the same student fails **multiple exams** in the same year in the same subject, then a maximum of one of the failed exams will be included

The effort of test re-takers should also be given serious consideration. If a student is going to have more difficulty passing the Common Core Algebra 1 exam, and a passing score will require even more times to take than the Integrated Algebra Exam, then this situation could definitely have an impact on graduation rates.

Down the road, NYSED should break out the data to see if the group of test re-takers will be taking the Common Core Algebra Exam more times than it took the Integrated Algebra Exam to reach a passing score of 65.

The other part of the methodology concerns what was meant by historical Regents Scores. The score setting is based on the average of previous years passing scores. Is this “historical range” figure based on all Regents Scores in one year or just the June administration? If it’s the former, then to be consistent, the population sampling should also have been based on the number of test takers in one year not just June.

- 7. Is NYSED and NYC-DOE offering enough help to students at risk of failing the Common Core Regents?** Every year, thousands of New York City High School students fail the Integrated Algebra exam and must retake it in order to graduate. There are six school districts where 15% to 22% more students failed the new Common Core Regents exam than the current Integrated Algebra exam. How will school districts that are already struggling with high failure rates for the Integrated Algebra (old Regents exam) now rise up to the challenge of the Common Core Algebra 1 Exam? The first year results show that students with disabilities and Limited English Proficiency (English Language Learners) failed the new Common Core Regents in much higher numbers than general education students. At least 25% of all NYC-DOE High School students are either a student with a disability or an English Language Learner. Will the NYC-DOE offer more professional development opportunities for high school teachers with large number of these two groups in their classes? Will the NYC-DOE offer more tutoring opportunities for these two groups of students?
- 8. Since few 11th grade students took the Common Core ELA Test last year, it is still not possible to know if there will be a significant change in statewide passing scores.** Schools were required to administer the new Common Core ELA Regents Exam only if 11th grade students had received a Common Core aligned English classroom curriculum. Consequently,

most schools or students did not take the test last year. Across New York State, only 19% of 11th grade students took both the Common Core Regents Exam and the Comprehensive English Exam. Still, the drop in the passing rate was 8%. This drop is definitely a cause for concern. When all 11th graders take the new Common Core ELA exam on the spring of 2016, will the passing rate be comparable with the old Regents Exam. A frequently heard concern with the English Common Core Exam is that it is more difficult than the currently used Regents Exam. This coming June, with more students taking the Common Core ELA Regents Exam, the test results should be closely studied by NYSED and NYC-DOE to see if the number of passing students remains similar to the old Regents Exams. Whatever the result, schools will only have one year to now prepare for the June 2016 deadline.

2013-14 School Year Regents ELA Exam Results

Results by Student Group	Comprehensive English (2005)	% Passing Score 65 or Higher		Common Core ELA	% Passing Score Level 3 or Higher
All Students	232,939	82		44,289	74

9. It’s been one year since the first Common Core Regents exams were administered. When will NYSED provide a report on the results of the first (and second year) administration of the exams? NYSED should explain how first year test results compared with their own Standard Setting test design for the new Common Core Regents Exams.

“The standard setting process was developed and implemented with great care, and best practices in assessment and psychometrics were followed. The policy decisions implemented were consistent with sound psychometric research to guarantee an effective and efficient standard setting.” Source: New York State Regents Examination in Algebra I (Common Core) and English Language Arts (Common Core) Standard Setting Technical Report. February 2015.

For the development of the Common Core Algebra 1 and ELA Regents Exam, a rigorous test development process was implemented over a six month period. The process was broken down into two parts: Performance Level Description and Standard Setting. A representative group of teachers, general ed and special ed, and test design experts were brought together from around the state for a panel to discuss and then approve the test material for passing each level: 2,3 4 and 5. For second meeting, the panel was given the Common Core Regents Test results from a sampling of students from the June, 2014 exam.

“The primary goal for these meetings was to establish cut scores that operationally define the five performance levels: Level 1, Level 2, Level 3, Level 4, and Level 5. The performance level designations will be used by local, state, and federal accountability programs and are central to communicating with parents, teachers, and the public. This document provides a detailed description of the activities held at each meeting.” Source: New York State Regents Examination in Algebra I (Common Core) and English Language Arts (Common Core) Standard Setting Technical Report. Prepared by Data Recognition Corporation, February 2015.

Great pains were taken to ensure that a representative body of test takers were used for the panel analysis, discussion and establishing cutoffs for test scores.

“A preliminary sample was identified, using test enrollment data with a series of stratification values that included: gender, ethnicity, English language learner (ELL) status, student with disabilities (SWD) status, socio-economic status, need/resource capacity (NRC) category, and previous performance on the applicable Regents Examination (i.e., Integrated Algebra or Comprehensive English).” Source: New York State Regents Examination in Algebra I (Common Core) and English Language Arts (Common Core) Standard Setting Technical Report. Prepared by Data Recognition Corporation, February 2015.

The near consensus of the panelists was that the test development process would yield the results as intended. Consequently, there shouldn't be any significant drops in the 65 or above passing rate.

Panelist Evaluation of Process

- 90% of Algebra I and 92% of ELA panelists agreed or strongly agreed that the process and methods used would produce appropriate results.
- 100% of Algebra I and 96% of ELA panelists agreed or strongly agreed that their bookmark placements accurately represented the knowledge and skills required for each performance level. Source: NYSED Setting Performance Standards: Common Core Regents Exams in Algebra I and ELA, June 2014

In the chart below, the “Common Core Standard Setting” are test scores that NYSED has projected for when students take the new Common Core Algebra 1 and English Regents Exam. The “historical median” is the median of the test score of the Regents exams administered statewide between 2008 and 2013. The comparison is further evidence that NYSED sees continuity in Regents test scores and graduation rates from the old Regents exams to the new Common Core system.

	Math Passing Rate	English Passing Rate
Common Core Standard Setting	65.4	76.5
Historical Median (2008-13)	68	76.6

Source: NYSED Setting Performance Standards: Common Core Regents Exams in Algebra I and ELA, June 2014

While the NYSED Standards Setting test design system appears to have worked well statewide, it offers small comfort to the New York City school districts that saw a 15% to 22% further drop in Regents Math test scores last year or to students with disabilities and English Language Learners. The drop might work itself out in the next Regents June 2015, as teachers have more time to prepare and adapt the 9th grade algebra classroom to the Common Core. Also, with each passing year, students taking the Regents will have more years of a Common Core based classroom curriculum.

Still, a fundamental concern hovers over the transition: what happens to the thousands of students already at risk of not graduating with a Regents Diploma under the old Regents Exam system? How are they going to succeed with an objectively more difficult Regents Exams?

NYSED owes all stakeholders, district administrators, school principals, teachers and parents, a thorough first year report of the transition to the Common Core Regents. The report should contain a detailed analysis of student test results data including a response to each of the issues raised here. Both groups of students, first time test takers and test re-takers, deserve serious attention.

10. **Will the Board of Regents extend the June 2016 deadline for the new Common Core ELA and Algebra 1 Regents?** The most recent guidance from NYSED “*Transition to Common Core Regents Examinations in English Language Arts and Mathematics, Original Issue Date: March 2013. Fifth Update: December 2014*” still has June 2016 as the official date when all 11th grade students will only be able to take the Common Core ELA Regents and students starting high school in the fall of 2013 or afterward will only be able to take the Common Core Algebra 1 Exam. The full results of the new Common Core Algebra exam (based on June, August and January administrations), and the passing rates, will not be known until spring of 2016. Does NYSED have enough information to stick to the June 2016 deadline for the Common Core ELA and Algebra only administration of the Regents Exams?



Author’s background: For the past three years, on behalf of my client organizations, I have been helping the yeshiva and day schools of New York City with the transition to the Common Core Standards. Private schools have absolutely no legal obligation to use the Common Core standards or administer the New York State ELA, Math or Regents exams. However, since at least 65% of all NYC yeshiva and day school students graduate from high school with a NYS Regents Diploma, the Common Core is now a reality for these schools (and all Catholic High Schools too). In practical terms, this means that most yeshiva high school students have to meet the same passing scores as their public school counterparts: a passing score is 65 or higher on the new Common Core Algebra, ELA, Geometry and Algebra II-Trig Regents exams. If a yeshiva student wants to attend a CUNY or SUNY four year college, it means they must get at least a 75 on the ELA and 80 on the Math tests. To help yeshiva and all private schools with the classroom alignment and transition to the Common Core Standards, I prepared a two publications: a 30 page implementation and for a shorter version in the form of a guide for principals and teachers. See attachment [Common Core Guide for Private Schools](#) . The more research I conducted on the transition, the needs of students with disabilities and English language learners kept coming up. As one teacher I interviewed put it, “my biggest fear is how my kids with learning issues are going to be able to pass the new tests in comparable numbers to the old one”. This quote stuck with me. As soon as the Regents Test scores for school year 2013-14 were posted on the NYSED, I gave them a careful look to see if there was a drop in the scores for General Education, Students with a Disability and English Language Learners. This is the second in a series of Discussion Papers about the New York City Department of Education High School System. Each Discussion Paper is posted on the “[Public Policy Forum](#)” webpage of my website. A third Discussion Paper will be released this summer.