

2017-18 New York State Regents Exams Results

Policy Alert

Thousands more students are failing Algebra 1 and ELA Regents Exam. Do high schools have sufficient resources to help struggling students pass these exams and graduate

David Rubel, Education Policy Consultant

www.davidrubelconsultant.com

December 2018

Summary: this past November, the New York State Education Department (NYSED) released the Regents Exam scores for 2017-18. It's now five years since the Algebra 1 (Common Core)¹ Regents Exam was first used in June of 2014. After five years of a transition period, schools should be in a much stronger position to teach the Common Core (now known as the Next Generation Learning Standards). However, this year's test results show a surprising shift downward with thousands more students failing the Algebra 1 Regents Exam. A Level 1 score means students are not on track to pass the exam. The Policy Alert shows that students with a Level 1 Algebra Regents exam nearly matches the same number of incoming students with a 8th Grade NYS Level 1 Math score. There was also a significant increase in the number of students failing the ELA Regents exam. Passing a math Regents exam is a requirement for graduation. There are two questions for all stakeholders: ***why are more students failing and do high schools have programs in place to help the struggling students.*** Below are findings and questions from an analysis of the one year change in test scores from 2016-17 to 2017-18 for Algebra 1 and ELA Regents exams.

▶ ***13,074 more students failed the Algebra 1 Regents exam in 2017-18:***

▶ ***12,456 more students failed the ELA Regents Exam in 2017-18***

▶ ***61% of all Students with Disabilities (SWD) and 60% English Language Learners (ELL) failed the Algebra 1 Regents last year. 49% of SWD and 63% of ELL students failed the ELA Regents exam.***

▶ ***A Level 1 math exam score conveyor belt from middle to high school needs to be stopped. At least 40,000 students entering NYS high schools need much more help than they get if they are going to have a chance at graduating:***

▶ ***NYC-DOE students mirror statewide slump. Is the NYC-DOE Algebra for All program targeting resources to where they are most needed?***

¹ The 2017-18 reporting of the Regents Exams test scores no longer includes the words "Common Core" for test name for the Algebra 1 and ELA Regents exams. For prior years, the exam was called Algebra 1 (Common Core) and English Language Arts (Common Core).

1. 13,074 more students failed the Algebra 1 Regents exam in 2017-18: For reasons that have yet to be determined, last year’s Algebra 1 Regents Exam was tougher for thousands of high school students. 13,074 more students failed the Algebra 1 exam this year than in 2016-17. The scoring system did not change so other factors must be in play. Two high need risk groups, Students with Disabilities and English Language Learners saw more students failing. 61% of students with disabilities group and 60% of English Language Learners are now failing the Algebra 1 Regents exam. *Are students with disabilities and English Language Learners getting the extra help they need to pass the Algebra 1 exam?*

Chart 1. NYS Students with a below 65 score/not passing on the Algebra Regents Exam

Regent Exam Test Takers	2016-17			2017-18			Change between 2017 and 2018	% Change between 2017 and 2018
	Total Test Takers	Failing/Score Below 65	% of total	Total Test Takers	Failing/Score Below 65	% of total		
All Students	280,741	71,106	25%	278,337	84,180	30%	13,074	5%
Students with Disabilities	49,046	26,844	55%	50,037	30,538	61%	3,694	6%
English Language Learners	28,308	15,257	55%	30,468	18,176	60%	2,919	5%

Source: <https://data.nysed.gov/>

2. 12,456 more students failed the ELA Regents Exam in 2017-18: 12,456 more students failed the ELA Regents in 2017-18 than in 2016-17; and increase of 5%. For the first two years of the ELA Common Core Exam, the test scores were impressive with a stable first year (2015-16) test results and even less students failing in the second year of test administration (2016-17) than with the old Comprehensive Regents exam. However, the 2017-18 test scores have thrown a wrench into the transition. The increase in the failing students occurred with both students with disabilities (3,955) and English Language Learners (2,699). 49% of SWD and 63% of ELL students failed the ELA Regents this year.²

NYS Students with a below 65 score/not passing on the ELA Regents Exam

Regent Exam Test Takers	2016-17			2017-18			Change between 2017 and 2018	% Change between 2017 and 2018
	Total Test Takers	Failing/ Below 65	% of Total	Total Test Takers	Failing/ Below 65	% of Total		
All Students	225,096	36,535	16%	229,620	48,991	21%	12,456	5%
Students with Disabilities	34,954	14,735	42%	37,773	18,691	49%	3,955	7%
English Language Learners	17,946	10568	59%	20,776	13,267	63%	2699	4%

² Regents Exams are administered three times a year: June, August and January.

3. At least 40,000 students entering NYS high schools need much more help if they are going to have a chance at graduating: A Level 1 test score means a student is not on track to graduate. The number of 8th Graders with Level 1 Math Scores closely matches Algebra 1 Regents Level 1 test scores. 8th graders entering high school in the fall of 2017 took the NYS Math exam in the spring of 2017. **43,701** of these 8th graders scored a Level 1 on the Math exam (taken in the spring of 2017). **39,924** students that failed the Algebra 1 Exam in 2018 (while most students take the exam in 9th for the first time, this figure also includes students taking the test again). When students enter high school with a Level 1 Math score, how much extra help are they getting to give them the boost they need to succeed with first year Algebra and pass the math Regents diploma requirement. ³ These students need more help than just their first year Algebra class (which is typically a large classroom of 27 students with a diverse range of learners); if the extra help is not made available, these students are basically doomed to struggle with failure with little chance of graduating. The chart below shows that high schools already have strong predictive data (Level 1 and Level 2 math scores for incoming 9th graders) showing how well students will fare on the Algebra 1 Regents Exam and if supplemental help should be offered.

Students Scoring Level 1 or Level 2 on the NYSED 8th Grade Math Test and Algebra 1 Regents

Level 1 Score: 2017 8 th Grade Math Test	Level 1: 2017-18 Algebra 1 Regents	Level 2 Score: 2017 8 th Grade Math Test	Level 2: 2017-18 Algebra 1 Regents
43,701	39,924	38,975	44,256

Source: <https://data.nysed.gov/>

4. New York City Department of Education (NYC-DOE) Schools

NYC-DOE public school students saw a similar increase in the number of students failing the Algebra 1 and ELA exams as the statewide figures. Below are three charts that document the increases.

Chart 1. NYC-DOE Students with a below 65 score/not passing on the Algebra Regents Exam⁴

Regent Exam Test Takers	2016-17			2017-18			Change between 2017 and 2018	% Change between 2017 and 2018
	Total Test Takers	Failing/Score Below 65	% of total	Total Test Takers	Failing/Score Below 65	% of total		
All Students	124,469	42,066	34%	124,389	48,469	39%	6,403	5%
Students with Disabilities	23,839	15,016	63%	25,089	16,984	68%	1,968	5%
English Language Learners	18,681	10,092	54%	19,696	11,803	60%	1,711	6%

³ "ROUGH CALCULATIONS: Will the Common Core Algebra Regents Exam Threaten NYC's Graduation Rates?" by Kim Nauer, Nicole Mader and Laura Zingmond August 2015. Center for New York City Affairs at the New School, shows how several NYC high schools offer extra help so that struggling students succeed with the Algebra 1 Regents exam. These schools had high passing rates.

⁴ <https://data.nysed.gov/>

With even more students failing, now at nearly 40%, how are the high schools managing with such large numbers of failing students. Do schools have the resources and strategies to help the large numbers of struggling students succeed with the Algebra and ELA Regents?

Can the NYC-DOE's Algebra for All program stop the middle to high school Level 1 scores conveyer belt: The NYC-DOE and NYSED schools share the conveyer belt phenomenon of students entering high school with Level 1 math scores and then failing the Algebra Regents exam with comparable number of level 1 score. Chart 2 below shows that NYC-DOE also possesses strongly predictive data for entering 9th graders not on track to graduate. These students are not going to jump two levels to a passing score with unless they receive significant extra help. In 2015, Mayor de Blasio announced his main new initiative for the City schools called Equity and Excellence". Part of Equity and Excellence is the Algebra for All (AFA) program. AFA's has several goals: to increase the number of schools and classes that offer Algebra in the 8th grade class; to improve the teaching skills of all math teachers from 5th to 9th grade. While the AFA addresses an important issue with equity by increasing the number of 8th grade Algebra classes, only higher achieving students will benefit. Still missing from the AFA program are resources specifically targeted to schools with significant numbers of students far off track/Level I math scores.

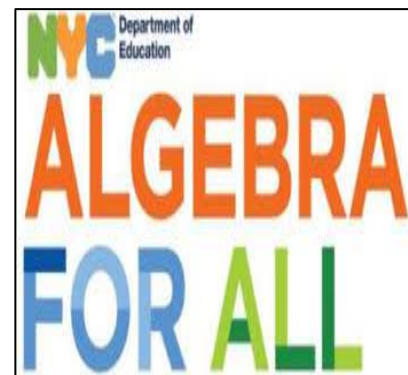


Chart 2. NYC-DOE Students Scoring Level 1 or Level 2 on the NYS 8th Grade Math Test and Algebra 1 Regents

Level 1 Score: 2017 8 th Grade Math Test	Level 1: 2017-18 Algebra 1 Regents		Level 2 Score: 2017 8 th Grade Math Test	Level 2: 2017-18 Algebra 1 Regents
21,736	23,187		18,497	25,282

Source: <https://data.nysed.gov/>

A May 2018 NYC Comptrollers Report shows that the NYC-DOE is spending \$25.8 million for AFA for school year 2018-19. How are these students expected to pass the Algebra 1 Regents without significant interventions? A math teacher, Marcelle Good, wrote a thoughtful blog piece for the *Math for America* organization when AFA was announced in 2016.

“The millions of dollars for citywide professional development for Algebra for All won’t help the teacher with a class of 34 fifth graders who are still struggling with second-grade math. That teacher needs 14 fewer students, and training on how to develop flexible teaching strategies to ensure students are building on what they already know when they are doing math. We need better assessment tools so that teachers can figure out where their students are. Then we give schools more resources to support students in meeting their social and emotional needs. Until we are responding to those needs, our students will fall further behind”.⁵



⁵ <https://www.mathforamerica.org/news/equality-%E2%89%A0-equity>

ELA Regents: For the first time, NYC-DOE 11th graders are also struggling to pass the Regents Exam. 28% failed the exam. In most high schools, students take the English Language Arts (ELA) Regents exam at the end of 11th grade. While the Algebra 1 exam has long been recognized as a serious hurdle, up until this year, the ELA had much lower numbers of failing students.

Chart 3. NYC-DOE Students with a below 65 score/not passing on the ELA Regents Exam

Regent Exam Test Takers	2016-17			2017-18			Change between 2017 and 2018	% Change between 2017 and 2018
	Total Test Takers	Failing/Score Below 65	% of Total	Total Test Takers	Failing/Score Below 65	% of Total		
All Students	93,365	20,838	22%	95,593	26,840	28%	7,802	6%
Students with Disabilities	16,191	7,601	47%	17,614	9,286	53%	1,685	6%
English Language Learners	12,494	7,308	58%	14,123	9,088	65%	1,780	7%

Source: <https://data.nysed.gov/>

5. Tracking at risk students to ensure they get the support they need to graduate

Instead of waiting for the graduation figures to be released, one strategy for NYSED and NYC-DOE to consider comes from the US Department of Education Institute for Education Sciences-What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) 2017 [Preventing Dropouts in Secondary Schools](#) Report. The main recommendation for increasing the graduation rate is for high schools to use a tracking system for at risk students. The WWC reports are widely accepted as the gold standard for education research as well as having practical applications to the classroom. NYSED and NYC-DOE should be able to offer information showing how many high schools are currently using a tracking system to help students stay in school and graduate.



Are Level 1 test takers getting the help they need to pass the Regents and graduate or falling through the cracks? Should NYSED make tracking Level 1 students part of its accountability system for school districts?

6. How many high schools track struggling students and provide extra support?

Some high schools have met the challenge of the Algebra 1 and ELA Regents exams with their own supplemental programs. Why do some high schools have supplemental programs for struggling students while others do not? There is no statewide policy requiring high schools to track students for passing the required Regents Exams or provide supplemental help. There also is no database on how many high schools track their students or offer supplemental programs. Every high school is required to prepare an annual Comprehensive Education Plan (CEP). The CEP is the primary means for the school leadership to engage in thoughtful planning and direct resources to where needs are greatest. This information is available to any school district official by simply reviewing a high school's annual Comprehensive Education Plan (CEP).

Annual Goals and Action Plans in the CEP

Annual Goal #1 and Action Plan

Use this template to identify an annual goal. Respond to each section to indicate strategies and activities in support of accomplishing this goal.

Annual Goal #1

- Describe a goal you have identified for the year. Refer to the directions and guidance for assistance in developing your goal.

Comprehensive needs assessment

- Describe the research-based instructional strategies and activities that will be used to achieve this goal. The needs assessment should encompass the entire school and be based on the performance of students, in relation to State academic content and student achievement standards.

Instructional strategies/activities

- Describe the research-based instructional strategies and activities that will be used to achieve this goal. Include descriptions of the following in your response:
 - strategies/activities that encompass the needs of identified student subgroups,
 - any personnel and other resources used to implement these strategies/activities,
 - steps taken to include teachers in the decision-making regarding the use of academic assessments to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies/activities,
 - timelines for implementation.

Strategies to increase parental involvement


- All schools should cite strategies to increase parent involvement that aligned to the goal when applicable. Title I schools should reference these activities in your school's Title I Parent Involvement Policy (PIP). The PIP template is provided on pages 11 through 15 in this CEP.

Budget and resources alignment

- Indicate your school's Title I status: School Wide Program (SWP) Targeted Assistance Program (TAP) Non-Title I
- Select the fund source(s) that your school is using to support the instructional goal:
 Title I _____ Title II _____ Title III _____ Grants _____ Other _____
 If other is selected describe here: _____

Service and program coordination

- Describe how you will coordinate fiscal and human resources with the instructional strategies/activities to achieve this goal, referencing specific FY13 PS and OTIS Budget categories selected above that will support the coordination and integration of Federal, State and local services, including programs supported under NCLB (e.g., services for students in Temporary Housing (TH), violence prevention programs, nutrition programs, housing programs, Head Start).



Thomas W. Katt, Chancellor

- There are five Annual Goal and Action Plan templates.
- Each plan is comprised of an annual goal and five components of the action plan.
- The responses provided for each of the components on the action plan should align with the specific annual goal identified.
- The collective responses provided on the action plans provide the regulatory information required (formerly captured in the CEP appendices).
- Each school should complete 3-5 annual goals and action plans.

7. The graduating class of 2018 will be the first cohort that was only allowed to take the Common Core Algebra 1 Regents Exam to satisfy the Regents diploma math exam requirement

In the next month or so, the class of 2018 graduation rate results will be announced. The class of 2018 is the first graduating class that was only allowed to take the Common Core Algebra 1 Regents Exam for the math Regents exam diploma requirement. While there may be a dip in the graduation rate for the first time in 17 years, the newly implemented [New York State Education Department \(NYSED\) Multiple Pathways to Graduation](#) 4 + CDOS, 4 + 1, test score appeals, local diploma safety net options and CDOS certificate will most likely keep the statewide graduation rate stable.

