



**Department of  
Education**

*Dennis M. Walcott, Chancellor*

February 2013

Dear Parents,

When I visit our schools, I always enjoy meeting with and talking to our students. This school year, I am seeing students read more difficult books and spend more time writing. When students share their opinions, teachers are asking them to use evidence to back up their points. In math class, students are solving real-world problems.

These changes are part of the new Common Core standards, which describe what all of our students from pre-kindergarten to 12<sup>th</sup> grade need to know and be able to do to graduate from high school ready for college and careers. These standards are challenging, and that's on purpose. To qualify for good jobs in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, our students need to develop strong writing, problem-solving, and creative skills. The Common Core standards, with support from you at home, will help us get there.

This spring, for the first time, students in grades 3-8 will take State reading and math tests based on these higher standards. Tests for high school students will begin to change next school year. We expect these new tests to be more difficult to pass, at first. But this change is important. It's going to help our schools broaden students' options for the future. Students, teachers, and parents need to understand where students are on the path to graduating prepared for college and a good job. With time and hard work, I have full confidence that our students will rise to the challenge.

You may be wondering if this change will affect how students are promoted to the next grade and admitted to screened schools. Though the State is introducing new tests this year, New York City will align promotion standards to the Common Core over time. In past years, decisions about summer school were made based on estimates of each student's performance level on the State tests: 1, 2, 3, or 4. This year, because the tests are new, we cannot predict how the State will determine performance levels. Instead, we will look at students' overall scores—how many questions each student got right. Students with the lowest scores will be recommended for summer school. Some students with disabilities and English language learners have different promotion standards, given their unique needs. We expect that the number of students attending summer school will be similar to last year. The students who need the most help will still receive the most support. Likewise, students who earn the highest scores—even if those scores are lower than in past years—will still have access to screened middle and high schools.

Over the next few weeks, I encourage you to speak with your child about the new tests. Reassure him or her that a score that is different from past years will not mean that your child isn't learning or working hard enough. The new standards are a big change for our students and our teachers, and teachers have been working hard to support students during the transition. Fully adjusting will take time. But I believe in our students and teachers, and I know we will get there.

Resources to help you learn more about these changes are available online. Visit [nyc.gov](http://nyc.gov) and search for "Common Core Parent Resources." I am also asking teachers and principals to talk with their school communities over the coming weeks about these new assignments and tests. I encourage you to attend upcoming parent-teacher conferences to learn more. Thank you for your commitment to your child's education.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dennis M. Walcott". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Dennis M. Walcott