

What Chancellor Klein Must Do to Stop NYC's Misuse of NY State Writing Test Scores

1. Immediately stop making school admissions decisions based on the flawed 4th grade writing test

Immediately instruct all NYC schools to stop using the state's writing test results for any and all decisions regarding applications or admissions to schools, gifted programs and other special programs. No school should exclude applicants based on the full ELA test scores. If schools need a way to shrink applicant pools to manageable levels, they could establish minimum thresholds based on the *multiple choice section only* of the ELA test. If schools need a way to assess students' writing for admissions decisions, they could use their own tests, or require writing samples done by students during the interview process. They could also ask the applicants' teachers for an assessment of their writing.

2. Immediately inform parents of the procedures by which they can review copies of their children's state tests and request a re-scoring of these tests

3. Stop using the state writing test scores in personnel evaluations

4. Stop using state writing test scores in school evaluations and in setting school performance targets

Using the 2006 ELA test results to set future performance targets for schools in the city's new "empowerment zone" would set an artificially low bar in terms of the percentage of students scoring 4's – one guaranteed to make schools look successful when the percentage of 4's inevitably goes up in future years. The only way to ensure integrity and meaningful measurement in this process is to discard the writing scores, which are subject to wild fluctuations in scoring from one year to the next (even in "good" years when tests are superior to this year's).

5. Publicly release new data for all NYC elementary schools providing the 4th grade ELA results excluding the writing portions

6. Promptly conduct a thorough statistical analysis of the 2006 4th grade ELA scores, including analysis of the 60% decline in the percentage of NYC 4th graders scoring a 4 on the test compared with 2005

This analysis should answer the following questions:

- What percentage of the NYC students who scored a 4 on the 3rd grade ELA test in 2005 scored a 3 in 2006? What percentage who scored a 3 in the 3rd grade scored a 4 in the 4th? What are the possible explanations for these numbers?
- What is the range of percentages, among NYC schools, by which the percentage of each school's 4th graders scoring a 4 changed from 2005 to 2006? Why did this percentage decline in some schools by as much as 75%, and in other schools negligibly? Are there any pedagogical or school-performance explanations for this wide variation? Or is the variation due to subjectivity and inconsistency in the grading of student writing? What happens to these numbers when the writing scores are excluded?

A significant sampling of 4th grade teachers should be surveyed as part of this analysis, to find out their assessments of the essay questions, and their analyses of the classroom breakdown of essay scores versus expected outcomes or students' actual writing skills.

Commissioner Mills and the public should be provided with the results of this analysis.

7. Review and revise the curriculum and materials designed to prepare NYC students for writing tests

This review should include materials such as the "Test-Taking as a Genre" curricular unit provided to NYC schools by Teachers' College. Any writing instruction that is not designed to teach good writing, but rather to teach students how to do well on the state's writing tests, should be discarded.

8. Ask Commissioner Mills to work with you and with independent experts in the teaching and evaluation of student writing to re-design the entire process by which the state's writing assessments are developed and scored