

1/22/09

Principal's Corner

The third, fourth, and fifth graders completed the New York State English Language Arts (ELA) Assessment last week. The teachers felt confident that their students were prepared to take the assessment, and everything went smoothly. This week, the sixth graders are taking the assessment.

The ELA is a rigorous test. It requires that students be able to read for sustained periods of time, with no interaction with their teachers or peers. They read and listen to challenging articles, stories, and poems, and answer questions in a variety of forms---multiple choice, short paragraphs, and longer essays. Many of the questions require that the students be able to *infer*, or use text evidence to draw a conclusion—about why a character did something, why an author wrote an article, or what the message of a story might be. These answers are not stated directly in the text, so students have to think deeply in order to respond correctly.

The multiple choice portions of the assessments are scored by machine, and the short answers and essays are scored by teams of teachers at regional scoring centers organized by the county's BOCES. (Board of Cooperative Educational Services) Unfortunately, we don't receive the results of the assessments until close to the end of the school year.

When we receive the results, we analyze our students' performance carefully. We examine the questions on which our students did well, and teachers share the instructional strategies they used that helped their students answer correctly. We also examine the questions that gave our students difficulty. We determine what the demands of the questions were, and what we might do differently in the future to help our students tackle such questions more successfully. The assessment data enables us to target instruction for individual students, and also helps us make adjustments to our language arts program so that all students are successful.

The assessments are a snapshot of our students' abilities to read, write, listen, and think. They give us valuable information about how they are doing, in terms of achieving the NYS Learning Standards, but they are just a small part of a bigger picture. What matters most is what our students do every day---how they read and discuss literature, acquire and present information, communicate in writing, collaborate to solve problems, and persevere in the face of challenges.

Thank you for your continued support.

Yours,

Mrs. Herschlein