

Testing season begins on LI

LI districts to give paper-based ELA tests this week

BY JOIE TYRRELL
AND JOHN HILDEBRAND
joie.tyrrell@newsday.com
john.hildebrand@newsday.com

Elementary and middle school students in at least 78 of Long Island's 124 public school districts will start taking the state English Language Arts exam in traditional paper-and-pencil style on Wednesday, as the multiday rollout of this spring's new test timeline continues.

With the state Education Department having shortened the test days from three to two, the 700-plus districts statewide were directed to choose two consecutive days from Wednesday through Friday for the paper-based ELA exam.

On Long Island, the number of districts administering the paper-based test on Wednesday and Thursday was drawn from a Newsday survey to which 96 districts responded. Districts also



Third-graders in Yaphank take the electronic ELA test last year.

can administer the test on Thursday and Friday.

For districts that decided to use computer-based tests in some grades, Tuesday was the first day that students took the electronic version of the ELA. Local systems had the option to schedule the computer-based test on two consecutive days from Tuesday through April 17.

Statewide, more than 32,000 students began those electronic tests — which feature the same material as the paper exams. That was more than the total for students taking both the ELA and math tests in 2017, Education Department spokesman

Jonathan Burman said.

"While there were some calls to technical support asking for assistance, all instances were resolved expediently and to the schools' satisfaction," he said. "All schools we have spoken with reported having very positive experiences."

On Long Island, a handful of districts — including Fishers Island, Islip, Merrick, West Islip and Westhampton Beach — told Newsday that Tuesday was the first of two days of computer-based ELA exams for some of their students.

In Islip, fourth- and fifth-graders took the test electroni-

cally.

"Several tools were available for students to use to make them more efficient readers," Ellen Semel, assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, said in a statement.

Christian Arsenault, principal of the tiny Fishers Island School, said students in the third, fourth and seventh grades starting taking the computer-based exam, or CBT, on Tuesday.

"We found the test to be very efficient, organized and technically sound," Arsenault said.

In a separate but related matter, a dispute has arisen over exactly how this year's state assessments will be scored.

The state's scoring system will have to be revamped because the current tests also are shorter in length than those used in the past. The question being fought over in Albany is whether revised scoring should be easier or held to the same difficult standard as before.

New York State United Teachers, the state's largest teachers union, wrote in a letter posted on its website that the Education Department should change scoring so that the number of students in

grades three through eight deemed proficient on tests would closely align with numbers of students passing Regents exams in high school.

Any such change would raise test-proficiency levels in grades through eight — numbers that previously hovered around 40 percent — to more than 70 percent.

Jolene DiBrango, the union's executive vice president, said in an interview Monday that the proposed change would allow "teachers and parents to be able to trust results from the exams."

Advocates of the current testing system, in a recent news release, accused the teachers' organization of "conducting a campaign to lower expectations for students."

With the start of paper-based testing Wednesday comes the possibility of significant boycotts of the controversial assessments. Test refusals on the Island, known as the epicenter of the opt-out movement, have run much higher than the state average — about 51 percent last year on the ELA.

With Michael R. Ebert
and Kathy Diamond

Spring break: Couple sunny days on the way

BY PATRICIA KITCHEN
patricia.kitchen@newsday.com

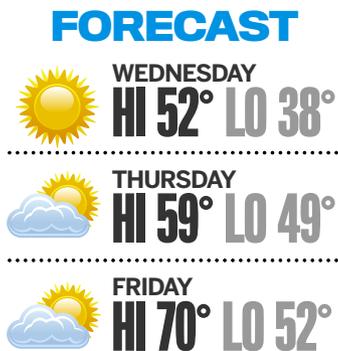
The spring weather prize is in sight, at least two days of it.

Both Friday and Saturday are expected to bring mostly sunny skies and temperatures in the 60s on Long Island, forecasters said.

Some areas in northern Nassau could reach 70 degrees on Saturday, said Faye Morrone, a National Weather Service meteorologist in Upton, based on the late Tuesday afternoon forecast.

Thursday gets the ball rolling with highs in the upper 50s, bringing a slight chance of showers starting in the afternoon, the weather service said. That follows Wednesday's expected high of around 50 degrees, still below the normal for the day, which is 56 degrees at Long Island MacArthur Airport.

Friday and Saturday will have mostly sunny skies, warming up to the mid- to upper 60s, the weather service said. Tempera-



tures a bit cooler can be expected "the farther south and east you go," with the Twin Forks not making it out of the 50s, Morrone said.

We have "two pretty decent spring days and certainly warmer than what we've seen in quite a while," she said.

As for Sunday? Things were expected to "go downhill," Morrone said, with areas of fog, drizzle and rain — and temperatures back down to around 50 degrees.



Mike Lettow and Katie Megiel ride their skateboards in Long Beach Tuesday.