

# Investigate Pearson's Teacher Certification Exams!



## CALL TO ACTION!

**We call on the NYS Board of Regents and State Education Department to take immediate action to:**

- **Conduct a full investigation of the new teacher certification exams—including lack of adequate field testing and lack of proof of validity and reliability.**
- **Allow experienced educators to weigh in on content problems with each of the new exams to bring them into compliance with professional standards.**
- **Consider input from students and faculty who have taken the new exams to address problems with Pearson's computer-based formats and testing sites.**

Aspiring teachers seeking certification in New York are forced to take teacher certification exams with erroneous content and numerous computer format problems.

All four exams—created and administered by corporate education giant Pearson Inc.—present unfair obstacles to student teachers. Teacher educators must be allowed to examine and recommend changes to these new and hastily implemented exams. There is a lack of transparency in the process used to address validity, reliability and passing score determination.

This fact sheet addresses New York State's three new computer-based teacher certification exams.

The fourth, the educative Teacher Performance Assessment (edTPA), is a complex performance assessment that is not administered in the same way as the other three. Concerns about the edTPA are presented in a joint union report at: <http://bit.ly/1E7pyM2>



There is no formal process to report potentially inaccurate items on the exams. Teacher educators have communicated concerns to SED, but those concerns have not been addressed.

Teacher education faculty paid Pearson’s per-exam fees and took the tests—under the same conditions students must take them—to ascertain the full content of the certification exams. What follows is a summary of exam problems, culled from information collected from faculty test takers.



**The problems identified here are examples, and do not constitute a full list of potential issues that should be addressed for these exams.**

## **EXAM CONTENT PROBLEMS**

### **EAS—Educating All Students**

- Many questions seem to have two acceptable answers.
- Content validity problems exist. The EAS assesses specific content for a wide range of developmental/grade levels in a manner inconsistent with the expected knowledge base of the test takers (example: a teacher candidate in a secondary education program should not be expected to know strategies to use with English language learners in an early childhood setting).
- A question requiring a written response asks candidates to describe how they would instruct different types of students in a traditional classroom setting. This question is not valid for students who have learned and will practice differential instruction in nonclassroom settings, as is the case with Physical Education instruction. Techniques used by physical education teachers to differentiate instruction are different from techniques used by classroom teachers.
- Information needed for document review is under more than one screen on the computer. The information can’t be bookmarked and there isn’t enough time to go from tab to tab to find information. The exam measures memorization of text more than the test taker’s understanding of important material.
- Score reports do not provide students with scores for each subarea on the exam; students who fail cannot determine which areas of the exam they need to address for possible retakes.

### **CSTs—Content Specialty Tests**

The following are illustrations for only three of the 41 different CSTs.

#### **CST—Multisubject—Early Childhood Parts 1 & 3**

- At least one question did not seem to have a correct answer.
- There is an inequitable distribution of questions across grade/age levels (38/40 questions related to K-2).
- Constructed response: Test takers are unable to copy/paste information into answer or highlight important information.

#### **CST—Multisubject—Childhood Parts 1 & 3**

- There are multiple subjective questions with more than one acceptable answer.

### **CST—Multisubject—Early Childhood & Childhood Part 2 (Math)**

- There are mislabeled graphics (example: nonsquare parallelograms labeled as squares).
- The Early Childhood exam assesses knowledge of higher level math content rather than assessing deep understanding of appropriate Early Childhood mathematic content and methods.
- Many questions are duplicated on the Early Childhood and the Childhood exams—most students are required to complete both exams.
- Test takers are unable to copy/paste for constructed response items. Complete answers require quotes from the text so the ability to copy/paste is needed on a timed exam.
- The Candidate Preparation Guide is unclear regarding access to a calculator during the exam.
- Reference materials available to candidates during testing should be shared in the Candidate Preparation Guide. Students should know what materials they will have access to during the test.

### **ALST—Academic Literacy Skills Test**

- Multiple choice questions are poorly composed—many seem to have multiple appropriate responses.
- Students must compare/contrast two passages, but both passages cannot be viewed at the same time on computer screens.
- Students have a very short time to read each complex text and then answer complex questions. This does not serve the test’s purported goals. Fast comprehension has nothing to do with understanding complex texts.
- Test takers are unable to copy/paste information from the text to an answer for constructed response items. Complete answers require quotes from text, so ability to copy/paste is needed on a timed exam.
- Test takers are unable to highlight/underline text in passages; this is necessary to support the use of research-proven strategies for answering questions.
- Limited access to writing materials inhibits application of research-proven study skills. Students cannot annotate or make adequate notes as they proceed through passages—which research has long established as “effective reading strategies.”
- Score reports do not include a breakdown by question type. Students who fail cannot determine which areas of the exam they need to address for possible retakes.

## **REGISTRATION PROCESS/PEARSON TESTING CENTER PROBLEMS**

- There is limited availability of scheduled appointments at testing centers and/or frequently changing schedule of exams.
- There have been reports of noise from other test takers and various distractions reported at some testing centers (test takers coming and going, printer and keyboard noise).
- Testing conditions are not uniform.
- There is a lack of consistency among centers (example: writing materials, headphones).
- Students are not told what materials will be provided at testing centers (calculators, formulas, writing surface, pencils, etc.).
- More than one test taker reported test center opening late or just on time (system recommends early arrival during registration process).

## INADEQUATE TEST PREP GUIDES AND PRACTICE TESTS

- Test takers had difficulty downloading the State Education Department interactive guide/Computer-Based Testing Tutorial.
- There are very few questions for each test in the prep guides.
- The interactive guide doesn't interface well with some web browsers.
- The prep guide format should be more similar to the appearance of the actual test.
- More sample questions are needed.
- Pearson should not require a nondisclosure agreement for practice tests. Practice tests should be available for public review.

## PEARSON PROFITS WHILE STUDENTS ARE SET UP TO FAIL

- It can cost close to \$1,000 to take all four of the new exams, plus required workshops, fingerprinting and certification application fees. Exam retakes and grievance/appeals pose additional costs.
- Pearson score reports are not adequate. Problems include the absence of substantive feedback and score breakdowns for different exam sections.
- Students pay for practice tests. Fees should be credited toward exam registration.



To **TAKE ACTION** and for **REGENTS' CONTACT INFORMATION**,  
visit the **UUP TEACHER EDUCATION TASK FORCE** web page at  
<http://uupinfo.org/committees/teached/taskforce.php>



For additional information or guidance, contact Jamie Dangler,  
UUP's statewide vice president for academics and Teacher Education  
Task Force chair, at 1-800-342-4206 or via email at [jdangler@uupmail.org](mailto:jdangler@uupmail.org)