

**The Buffalo Criterion**  
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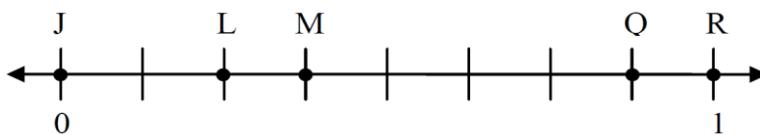
**Buffalo Schools at the Crossroads:**

**The Myth of Failing Schools – Are You Smarter than a 3rd Grader?**

By Barbara A. Seals Nevergold, Ph.D.

For the last few weeks I have been writing about the impact that the New York State Standardized Assessments: the ELA (English Language Arts) and Math Tests have on how our schools are categorized – Good Standing, Focus and Priority. This will be the last in the series on this issue for now. But before I leave this subject I thought my readers would be interested in getting a first-hand look at an actual test question (space does not permit more). The State Education Department released a sampling of the 2014 tests in August and you can find these questions and rationales used for grading each test at <https://www.engageny.org/resource/new-york-state-common-core-sample-questions>. The ELA Tests are principally made up of long reading passages. The paragraphs in the articles are numbered and students are given multiple choice questions or are asked to write short answer responses. The multiple choice questions gave four possible answers. Students need to reference the article in order to provide their answer. The Math tests combine word problems along with questions based on charts, graphs, and other visuals. Here is an example from the 3rd grade Math Test below:

**The number line below shows five points, labeled J, L, M, Q, and R.**



**Which two points have a distance of  $\frac{3}{8}$  between them?**

- A**     **J and L**
- B**     **J and M**
- C**     **L and Q**
- D**     **M and R**

The ELA and Math Tests are given to all children in the schools, across New York State. That includes students with disabilities and students with limited English proficiency. While these students are given some accommodations, e.g. students with disabilities are given more time to finish the tests, they take the SAME tests. This means that other than extended time, there is no substantial differentiation in the tests themselves for students who have different levels of ability.

The ELA tests are given over a three day period during one week followed by the Math tests over the same period during the following week or two. The testing series takes about an hour and a half for each day of testing. The tests are timed, so this adds added stress to the test taking process for students who have test anxiety or do not do well on timed tests. There are many more issues regarding student response to these tests. For example, many parents in Buffalo and other Districts have decided to have their children “Opt-out” of the testing.

Over the next few weeks I will be asking teachers for feedback on their experiences with their students and will share those in a future article. If you are a teacher and want to share your experiences; bad and good with the New York State ELA and Math Tests, Grade 3-8, please email me at [banevergold@buffaloschools.org](mailto:banevergold@buffaloschools.org).