Smithtown Central School District
26 New York Avenue, Smithtown, New York 11787

Dr. Stephanie O'Brien
Director of Science
(631) 382-3019

Mark Secaur, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

Dear Fifth Grade Families:

We're excited to share information about how your child is learning science! Science learning in your child's elementary classroom has been evolving to focus on real-world application and deeper understanding, moving away from simple memorization. This shift is driven by the adoption of the New York State Science Learning Standards (NYSSLS).

What does this mean for my child?

The standards introduce a more hands-on, engaging, and relevant approach to science education. This focus emphasizes that science is not just a series of isolated facts but an interrelated world of inquiry and phenomena. In practice, this means your child's classroom has shifted from activities focused on memorization to those focused on investigation, application, and solving real-world problems.

How will my child be assessed?

To accurately measure student learning against these new standards, we have been using an online platform called Inner Orbit for many of our assessments. Your child is already familiar with Inner Orbit, as it has been used for science assessments in both third and fourth grade. Inner Orbit assessments are specifically designed for the new standards. Students are required to figure out how or why a phenomenon occurs by applying their knowledge and skills, rather than restating memorized facts.

NYS-aligned assessments include:

Phenomena-Based Tasks: Each task starts with an observable, real-world event or problem (a phenomenon), such as a rusty bike or a changing shadow. Instead of simply asking for a definition, students must use their knowledge to make sense of why the phenomenon occurs or how to solve the related problem. This provides an authentic, real-world context for demonstrating genuine scientific thinking.

You can be assured that the types of NYS-aligned science assessments your child experiences as they progress through fifth grade is highly consistent through middle school, high school, as well as on all state and Regents exams.

To view past state-level exams, please use the links below:

- *Spring 2024*
- *Spring 2025*

How Can I Support My Child at Home?

- **Review Clusters:** After each activity in the science launch log or Inner Orbit, there are cluster questions to assess student understanding. These are helpful for reviewing key concepts.
- **Student Self-Assess Performance Level Descriptions:** In the launch log, you'll find "I can" statements for each standard, explaining what students are required to do. Students should be comfortable with the vocabulary and skills listed. (This is typically on the last page of the Launch Log.) *Here is an* example *for the upcoming ecosystems test.*
- **Inner Orbit:** Students can access Inner Orbit through Classlink to review any practice clusters they have completed for the module in class.
- Study Guide -list of key concepts and performance level descriptors.
- Formative Practice Set - Key vocabulary addressed in the standards.
- **Core Knowledge Books:** These leveled readers are used in class to support content understanding. If your child is struggling with specific content, these resources can be accessed at home. Here *is the one for ecosystems.*

Resources and Contact

For more information and resources on our elementary science program, please visit our district elementary science page: Our District Elementary Science Page

Additional Parent Resources

- *New York State Parent Guide to Science*
- *3-5 Parent Guide*

Regards,

Stephanie O'Brien, Ph.D.
Director of Science
Email: sobrien@smithtown.k12.ny.us
Phone: 631-382-3052