

## Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers

Parents:

In March, your student will participate in the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers testing, also known as PARCC. This test, adopted by 20 different states including Illinois, is designed to determine student growth within the Common Core State Standards. PARCC, then, replaces the ISAT tests previously given to grades 3-8 and the Prairie State Achievement Exam (PSAE) given to all juniors.

The purpose of PARCC is to better determine a student's understanding and ability as they progress through each grade level. At the same time, performance based components of the PARCC test are designed to measure what a student needs in order to more successful as they prepare for post-secondary education and careers. Unlike previous assessments, PARCC is a computer based test and all students will complete this online.

This year, Meridian CUSD #15 will administer the PARCC test to all students in grades 3-8 and those high school students enrolled in Algebra I and/or English I. Each individual school within the district has established their own testing dates during the month of March. Please look for information regarding when your child will take their portion of the PARCC test in your student's "home notes" and newsletters.

As parents, please find information regarding the PARCC test accompanying this letter. This information will help you, as a parent, to talk with your child about the PARCC test and its importance. At the same time, below are some ways to help your student prepare

- Eat healthy meals
- Eat a good breakfast on the mornings of the tests; avoid sugary cereals and foods as they burn energy quickly
- Get plenty of rest leading up to the tests.
- Read all directions before starting each section of the PARCC
- Make sure you understand what is being asked
- Make sure you understand how to answer the questions as PARCC has a variety of response based items
- Make sure you read everything before trying to answer
- Make sure you are familiar with the online tools. Teachers have been working with students to help them access and manipulate these tools
- Think clearly and stay positive



## Ten Things to Know About the New K-12 PARCC Assessments

1. Kindergarten teachers through college-level professors from across the country, including Illinois, helped develop the new Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessments to see how well students are achieving under new, more rigorous and internationally benchmarked learning standards in English language arts (ELA) and math.
  - The PARCC assessment will be administered to all third- through eighth-graders and some high school students in Illinois public schools during the 2014-15 school year.
2. The PARCC assessments measure a broad range of knowledge and skills, such as problem-solving and critical thinking, that are essential for success. The PARCC assessments also measure writing at all grade levels, a valuable indicator of college and career readiness and a skill that was only assessed intermittently and for certain grade levels on previous state tests.
  - The PARCC assessments emphasize rigor, depth and application of knowledge – not just rote memorization. Performance-based exercises and technology-enhanced features yield more information than what was generated through previous state tests.
3. The PARCC assessments provide a clear marker to show if students are on track for college and career, contributing to statewide efforts to support students' education from cradle to career. PARCC tests represent the first K-12 coherent assessments and replace the Illinois Standard Achievement Test and the Prairie State Achievement Examination, which have been used for more than a decade but were not aligned to one another, resulting in a disconnect that showed a greater portion of elementary students than high school students meeting state standards.
  - Now Illinois students will face consistent and high expectations at each grade level, giving parents and educators more accurate and timely information to intervene and determine whether students need remediation or more advanced instruction.
4. Staying on track for college and career means saving money. The PARCC will support efforts to provide a more efficient path to a college degree and career skills. We know that when students can start their postsecondary education in college credit-bearing courses, they're more likely to graduate. A 2011 national report shows 56 percent of students nationwide earn a bachelor's degree within six years. That falls to 35 percent when we look at students who have taken remedial courses. To view the Complete College America report, endorsed by governors, see [http://www.completecollege.org/docs/Time\\_Is\\_the\\_Enemy\\_Summary.pdf](http://www.completecollege.org/docs/Time_Is_the_Enemy_Summary.pdf).
  - At least 20 percent of all college students must take costly remedial courses when they get to college and that percentage jumps to roughly 50 percent when you look at those enrolled in Illinois two-year community colleges after students did everything required to graduate from high school.

5. Students in 29 states, the US Virgin Islands and the District of Columbia are scheduled to take either the PARCC assessment or Smarter Balanced, an assessment system also aligned to the new learning standards in math and ELA.
  - For the first time, Illinois parents will be able to see how their students' elementary and secondary state test scores compare against the test scores of students in other states.
6. At the high school level, districts were given flexibility this year to choose one of three combinations of PARCC high school-level assessments in ELA and math. The majority of high schools – more than 60 percent – will administer exams linked to ELA/Literacy 3 and Algebra 2/Integrated Math 3.
  - The state will continue to fund the ACT to 11th-graders in all districts that opted to give the test on March 3. March 4 is reserved for the ACT's WorkKeys exams.
7. Nationally, the PARCC exam was field-tested by more than 1 million students in 16,000 schools in 14 states and the District of Columbia. Improvements were made based on the field tests and on feedback from students, teachers and others. The PARCC assessment continues to be reviewed for quality, rigor and fairness.
  - In Illinois, more than 110,000 students in 500 districts and 1,200 schools participated last spring in PARCC assessment field-testing.
8. More than half of all Illinois schools will administer the PARCC assessment online this spring. The ultimate goal is for the PARCC assessments to be administered online in all Illinois schools, which will likely take several more years to accomplish as schools expand and upgrade equipment and infrastructure.
  - The PARCC assessments will also be administered via paper and pencil in Illinois schools during the 2014-15 school year.
9. Schools will take the PARCC summative assessment in two parts to provide adequate test-taking time and measure different kinds of knowledge and skills. The first part is the Performance-Based Assessment (PBA), to be given when approximately 75 percent of instruction is completed and featuring more extended tasks and writing exercises. The second part is the End of Year assessment (EOY), given when approximately 90 percent of instruction is completed. The EOY is shorter than the PBA and asks students to demonstrate their acquired skills and knowledge by answering computer-based, machine-scorable questions. The results from the End of Year assessment will be combined with the Performance-Based Assessment to produce a student's summative assessment score. To learn more visit <http://parcconline.org/did-you-know-why-are-there-two-parts-test>.
  - PARCC assessment results will be available to families next fall. Going forward, the PARCC assessments will produce more timely results to help monitor student progress and target instruction and intervention as needed.
10. Students will spend approximately 6 ½ to 7 ½ hours on the PARCC tests, depending on grade level. They will not take the entire test in one sitting. The assessment is broken into two parts and each part includes several units. Most students will complete each unit in 40 to 60 minutes. The PARCC states recommend no more than two units of testing in a day.
  - PARCC testing time represents less than 1 percent of the school year in Illinois. Each school will schedule testing dates and times within a common window, which was shared with districts in July 2014. The dates are also posted on the State Board's website under assessments at <http://www.isbe.net/assessment/pdfs/2015/assessment-dates-14-15.pdf>.



# Parents' Guide to New Assessment in Illinois



In 2010, Illinois began implementing the new Illinois Learning Standards, based on the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The CCSS provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn in English language arts and mathematics as they progress through grades K–12.

In school year 2014–15, Illinois will be rolling out new assessments aligned to the CCSS. The new assessments will be used to gauge how well students are mastering the CCSS — and, ultimately, how ready they are for college and further career education.

## What are the new Illinois Learning Standards based on the Common Core?

The new Illinois Learning Standards based on CCSS are designed to enhance and improve student learning by embracing higher expectations and a clearer focus than the previous learning standards. They are more relevant to the real world, giving young people the knowledge and skills they need for college and career success.

The new standards emphasize fewer topics and stress not only procedural skills, but also problem solving and critical thinking. The CCSS build knowledge from grade to grade, enabling students to master important concepts before moving on to others.

**The standards are not a curriculum.** Decisions about curriculum, tools, materials and textbooks are best left to local educators and community members who know their students best.

The CCSS were developed through a state-led initiative, spearheaded by governors and school superintendents, in collaboration with teachers, school administrators,

college faculty, parents and education experts. They build on the excellent foundation laid across all states, and have been internationally benchmarked to ensure rigor on par with top-performing nations.

To date, more than 45 states and the District of Columbia have adopted the CCSS. In 2010, Illinois began implementing the new Illinois Learning Standards, incorporating CCSS changes in each district, school, and classroom. To support professional development and collaboration, Illinois educators have created many free resources for teachers and schools.

## THIS GUIDE INCLUDES:

- Overview of new assessments, which measure student proficiency against more rigorous standards
- Sample test items
- overview of accountability for students, teachers and schools
- additional resources for parents

# CCSS-Aligned Assessments

## WHY NEW ASSESSMENTS?

Teachers and principals talk a lot about assessments, which are used to measure students' academic achievement. This document highlights the end-of-year summative assessments, which judge student progress toward mastering state standards and program and school effectiveness. For other assessments used, see box at right.

New summative assessments will address longstanding concerns that parents, educators, and employers have had about current state assessments—namely that they measure students' ability to memorize facts, rather than their critical thinking and knowledge application skills.

## WHAT IS DIFFERENT ABOUT THE NEW ASSESSMENT?

The new assessments will enable educators to deepen their understanding of student progress from grade to grade—and just as importantly, identify any gaps in progress so they can address them **well before students enter college or the workforce.**

## Types of assessments

**Formative:** Individual tests given in the classroom by teachers as needed throughout the year to assess knowledge and skills in specific areas in specific areas

**Interim:** The same test repeated at set intervals to measure student growth over time

**Summative:** End-of-year assessments administered by the state to measure student performance against a common set of standards

*This document addresses summative assessments.*

## English language arts assessments will demonstrate:

- Whether students can read and comprehend texts of varying complexities.
- How well students can integrate information across sources to make a persuasive argument.
- The degree to which students can use context to determine the meaning of academic vocabulary.

## Math assessments will demonstrate:

- Whether students understand and can use important math ideas, including number sense, algebraic thinking, geometry, and data analysis.
- The extent to which students can use math facts and reasoning skills to solve real-world problems.
- How well students can make math arguments.

## Benefits of new assessments

- During the next few years, assessments will provide results more quickly and in an increasingly readable and easy-to-understand format, most likely online. Parents can use this information to better communicate with teachers and school administrators about their child's progress, and teachers can use it to better tailor instruction to the child's needs.
- Computer-based assessments will eventually replace pencil and paper tests. Computer-based assessments are more efficient, innovative, and engaging, and they enable insight into student progress at multiple points.
- The new assessments will be designed to provide accurate measures of achievement and growth for all students, including those with disabilities and English language learners. Online assessments can address visual, auditory, and physical-access barriers for students with disabilities, while enabling them to take tests at the same time as others in their class. English language learners will be able to demonstrate knowledge in the various content areas (e.g., math, science, and social science), regardless of their level of proficiency in English. The intention is not to give these students an advantage, but to provide the accessibility needed for accurate results.

### Who is developing the new assessments?

Because the CCSS is a state-led initiative, most states chose to join one of two consortia of states working together to develop new assessments based on the Common Core State Standards. These are the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC).

Illinois is a member of PARCC along with more than 17 other states and the District of Columbia. However, all final decisions about assessments remain at the state level, in partnership with local educators. Read more about PARCC at [www.parcconline.org](http://www.parcconline.org).

## College and Career Readiness Defined:

The level of preparation a student needs to enroll and succeed — without remediation — in a credit-bearing course at a postsecondary institution that offers a baccalaureate degree or in a high-quality certificate program that enables students to enter a career pathway with potential future advancement.

# Sample questions by grade level

The following questions are representative of those found on the new assessments. For more examples, visit [www.parconline.org/samples/item-task-prototypes](http://www.parconline.org/samples/item-task-prototypes).

## EXAMPLE OF A 4<sup>TH</sup> GRADE MATH QUESTION

Three classes at Lakeview School are going on a field trip. The Table shows the number of people in each class, including the teacher.

They can choose to use buses, vans, and cars.



Buses have 20 seats



Vans have 16 seats



Cars have 5 seats

	Total number of people
Mrs. Ruiz's Class	23
Mr. Yangs's Class	25
Mrs. Evan's Class	24

Which three combinations can be used to take all three classes on a field trip?

- 1 bus and 4 vans                       1 bus and 8 cars  
 3 vans and 11 cars                     2 buses and 3 vans and 4 cars  
 1 bus and 1 van and 6 cars

Submit Answer

## EXAMPLE OF A 6<sup>TH</sup> GRADE ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS QUESTION

Students are asked to read a passage from the fiction text "Julie of the Wolves" by Jean C. George and answer the following:

### SAMPLE ITEM

In the passage, the author developed a strong character named Miyax. Think about Miyax and the details the author used to create the character. The passage ends with Miyax waiting for the black wolf to look at her.

Write an original story to continue where the passage ended. In your story, be sure to use what you have learned about the character Miyax as you tell what happens to her next.

Answer:

## EXAMPLE OF A 10<sup>TH</sup> GRADE ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS QUESTION

### SAMPLE ITEM

Use what you have learned from reading "Daedalus and Icarus" by Ovid and "To a Friend Whose Work Has Come to Triumph" by Anne Sexton to write an essay that provides an analysis of how Sexton transforms Daedalus and Icarus.

As a starting point, you may want to consider what is emphasized, absent, or different in the two texts, but feel free to develop your own focus for analysis.

Develop your essay by providing textual evidence from both texts. Be sure to follow the conventions of standard English.

Answer:

## What Parents Can Expect

This is a new set of standards and assessments with a new way of scoring. Therefore, it is not possible to directly compare new scores with old ones.

The new assessments measure deeper knowledge and skills deemed particularly important for students' futures, including problem-solving, writing, and critical thinking.

Because the standards are more rigorous, student achievement scores may initially be lower.

A dip should not necessarily be interpreted as a decline in student learning or in educator performance. Educators expect the short-term decline to reverse as teachers and students become more familiar with the standards and better equipped to meet the challenges they present.



**Take Action:** Parents can work with their child's teachers to learn about the new curriculum and understand how to support their children to minimize any dips in assessment scores.

### How will schools support students during the transition?

Schools have created a variety of models to assist students who are struggling with the standards. Remediation and summer courses, as well as in-class adjustments are just a few support strategies.

### How will schools, students, and teachers be held accountable?

The Illinois State Board of Education is currently revising its accountability plan to include the new assessments as well as other measures of school and district effectiveness. Schools and districts that do not show evidence of student progress will receive supports to improve outcomes for students.

In the immediate future, even if a student does not meet proficiency levels, there will be no negative consequences such as holding him or her back a year. Parents can work with the school to develop an improvement plan tailored to the specific student's needs.

New rules regarding teacher evaluation have outlined how accountability measures will be implemented to ensure that teacher effectiveness is measured against student progress throughout the year. These rules are being phased in over the next few years.



**TAKE ACTION:** Parents need to pay close attention to the new accountability system put in place so they can better advocate for their children. Parents' collective voice is critical to ensure that testing is implemented well and with enough resources to ensure success. The state should include parents and teachers in thoughtful conversations based on trust, collaboration, and respect. If you would like additional details about how students, teachers, and schools will be held accountable or more information on assessments in general, please call the Illinois State Board of Education at (866) 262-6663.

#### HERE ARE SOME QUESTIONS YOU MIGHT WANT TO ASK:

- What will happen if my child does not meet proficiency on the new assessments?
- How will teacher evaluations be affected if students don't meet proficiency levels?
- How will school ratings change based on results of the new assessments?

# Preparing and supporting your child

- Discuss the new tests with your child. Make sure he or she is not afraid or anxious going into the new tests.
- With an older child, explain that the new assessments were created to ensure he or she is on track to succeed after graduation and to identify any issues early enough to give more support where it is needed.
- Explain to your child that the tests will initially be more challenging. Tell your child you have high expectations and that you are there to help every step of the way.
- Review test results with your child, taking time to discuss areas of strength and areas where there is room for improvement. Bring the teacher into the discussion as needed.
- Provide a quiet, comfortable place for studying at home and make sure your child gets a good night's sleep before a test.

## Staying informed and involved

- Read all comments written by the teacher on classroom lessons and tests. Ask teachers to explain anything that is unclear and discuss how you can best work together to address any concerns.
- Monitor your child's progress. If your child needs extra help or wants to learn more about a subject, work with his or her teacher to identify opportunities for tutoring, after-school clubs, or other resources.
- Understand that a single test score does not represent all that your child can or cannot do. It is a snapshot only. Assessment scores are useful but should not be the only factor in determining a child's academic growth.
- Meet with your child's teacher as often as possible to discuss your child's progress. Ask for activities to do at home to help your child prepare for tests and to improve your child's proficiency in skills called for in the CCSS.

## Additional Resources

- For a more detailed look at what the CCSS mean at each grade level, visit [www.pta.org/parentsguide](http://www.pta.org/parentsguide).
- For more on how district personnel will support the CCSS implementation, visit [http://www.isbe.net/common\\_core/pls/default.htm](http://www.isbe.net/common_core/pls/default.htm).



# Illinois State Board of Education

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## FAQs

### PARCC ASSESSMENT

January 2015, ISBE Division of Public Information

#### **Q: What is the testing time for the PARCC assessment?**

**A:** The PARCC assessment will require slightly more testing time than the ISAT and PSAE. However, testing will be divided into two separate administrations in early spring (March) and the end of the school year (May) and incorporate more technology-enhanced questions and a writing component at each grade level. Overall times fluctuate depending on grade level, but the PARCC assessment allots an average of 8-10 hours – extended over several days and two testing windows. Most students finished earlier than the allotted time during field testing last spring. Students are expected to spend approximately 6 ½ to 7 ½ hours on the PARCC exams, depending on grade level, and the PARCC assessment alone will account for less than 1 percent of the school year.

#### **Q: What are the consequences of PARCC testing this year?**

**A:** This is a baseline year so there are no consequences for schools or students. The numbers will be used as a baseline in order to measure growth by students, schools and districts in the future. The first year of data will also be used to establish cut scores that determine the performance levels at which students can be deemed “college and career ready.” The PARCC assessments are standardized and the performance results of students in Illinois can be compared directly with their peers across the nation.

#### **Q: How will the PARCC assessment affect the administration of the ACT?**

**A:** ISBE listened to local districts that wanted the state to continue to fund and provide the ACT, so districts now have the choice to administer the ACT Plus Writing and/or the WorkKeys® in addition to a PARCC high school level combination of ELA and math assessments tied to specific courses. All 11th-grade students within a given district will take the ACT Plus Writing on March 3, if the district chose to offer the test. March 4 has been set aside for the ACT WorkKeys® in participating districts. These tests are fully paid for by ISBE. Illinois is among a handful of states that has provided the ACT to all students, free of charge, for the past decade.

#### **Q. Why can't Illinois delay implementation of the PARCC assessments?**

**A:** In 2010, the Board adopted the new Illinois Learning Standards in ELA and math and districts were free to begin reviewing and implementing the new standards with the 2013-14 school year set as the deadline for full implementation prior to the PARCC assessments.

In December 2014, the U.S. Department of Education recently confirmed our understanding of current laws regarding accountability and that there is no waiver to districts that may want to delay administering the PARCC. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA, also known as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001) – requires states (including Illinois) receiving Title I funds to provide for administration of the state's academic assessment to all designated students. Additionally, the department confirmed that the same assessment must be used for all students, with some limited exceptions such as an

alternate assessment for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. The department spelled out expectations for both state and local education agencies in addition to outlining the possible penalties that could be imposed upon each in its letter posted at <http://www.isbe.net/assessment/pdfs/USED-ESEA-asmt-clarification-1214.pdf>.

**Q. Why can't my child simply take the ACT instead of the PARCC assessment?**

**A:** We understand the utility of other standardized tests such as the ACT. The ACT is developed to adhere to its own college readiness standards, which differ from the K-12 Common Core Learning Standards in use by the other PARCC and Smarter Balanced members. But PARCC is a different test. We believe PARCC is more comprehensive than our prior Illinois assessments, inviting students to think deeply and construct their own solutions to challenging tasks and situations. An assessment that requires students to analyze information – and explain their answers – better reflects classroom lessons and experiences.

**Q: Can the PARCC assessment be used for college acceptance?**

**A:** Institutions of higher education are working toward acceptance of PARCC assessment results as a way to show readiness for college-level work without remediation. PARCC assessments have always been framed as a placement exam and not an entrance exam, allowing colleges and universities to place those students testing at the “college and career ready” level in credit-bearing courses (as opposed to remedial courses).

**Q: Can individual students opt out of the PARCC assessments? Can parents opt their children out of the PARCC assessments?**

**A:** No. Districts can develop a policy for those students who refuse to take assessments on testing days, but federal and state law does not provide for any opt-out provisions. If fewer than 95 percent of students in a district do not take the assessment, the district will automatically fail to meet their accountability obligations and be at risk of losing federal funding, hurting our schools and ultimately all of our students.

**Q: Will students with disabilities and English language learners (ELLs) also take the PARCC assessment and if so, what types of accommodations will the test allow?**

**A:** Students with disabilities will take either the PARCC or the Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM-AA) assessment. The DLM-AA, which replaces the Illinois Alternate Assessment, is the test for the students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. IEP teams determine which test will be most appropriate for individual students. The PARCC assessment includes a number of features to assist students with disabilities. A manual listing potential accommodations has been made available [here](#) on the PARCC website. The manual addresses the specific needs of students with disabilities, English learners and English learners with disabilities.

ELs will take the PARCC and DLM-AA assessments using appropriate accommodations. Illinois will also continue to use ACCESS For ELLs®, a standards-based, criterion-referenced English language proficiency test designed to measure ELs' social and academic proficiency in English.

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