



Illinois State Board of Education

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NEWS

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

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Schools set to give state's new assessment to third-through eighth-graders and high school students

PARCC assessment measures how well students are prepared for next grade and, ultimately, college and careers

SPRINGFIELD —Schools across Illinois are ushering in a new assessment system designed to better gauge how well students are prepared for the next grade level and, ultimately, for success after high school. Starting March 9, most third- through eighth-graders and some high school students across the state will begin taking the first of a two-part assessment completely aligned to the new internationally benchmarked Illinois Learning Standards.

"This is a significant shift," said State Superintendent of Education Christopher A. Koch. "This is not the test most parents faced while in school nor is it similar to assessments Illinois students took a year ago. This is a test designed from the ground up to reflect the demands of the new learning standards and their emphasis on not just mastering content but being able to demonstrate and apply critical thinking to real-world issues."

About a million Illinois public school students will begin taking the first part of the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessment next week. The PARCC assessment, which replaces the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) and the Prairie State Achievement Examination (PSAE), measures how well students are achieving under Illinois' new, more rigorous learning standards in English language arts and math. The PARCC assessment focuses on the most important knowledge and skills that students need in these subjects and includes performance-based exercises and technology-enhanced features that better engage students and better measure their understanding, reasoning and ability to apply concepts. The assessment also includes writing – a critical skill for high school graduates, according to colleges, universities and employers. These features will ultimately produce more timely and meaningful data on whether students are on track for college and careers. The results will also help educators and parents monitor student progress and target instruction and appropriate interventions as needed.

This school year 75 percent of students will take the PARCC assessment online and the remaining students will take the same test in a paper-and-pencil format until their schools have the necessary technology and broadband infrastructure. Illinois, like many other states, aims to administer the test online to all students within the next few years.

The Illinois State Board of Education has been working with districts and education partners for a couple of years to prepare for the PARCC assessment.

About 111,000 Illinois students in 500 districts and 1,200 schools participated last spring in PARCC assessment field-testing. 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 test “items,” or questions, call on students to not simply fill in the bubble, but to also show their reasoning and problem-solving skills through innovative and technology-enhanced questions. Test takers will need a deeper understanding of most concepts and will be asked to reference text or evidence supporting their answer.

“The questions on the PARCC assessment push students to dig a little more deeply and demonstrate their thinking process,” said Kathy Felt, a math teacher in Sherrard Community Unit School District 200 in the Quad Cities and an associate professor of mathematics at Western Illinois University. “Students should not feel like they’re simply regurgitating information or memorized facts. The test should mirror an engaged and active classroom experience. The best feedback I’ve received to date was during the field test last spring when a student told me that he didn’t even feel like he took a test.”

PARCC Timeline

2010

The State Board adopts the new Illinois Learning Standards based on the Common Core standards in English language arts (ELA) and math.

Illinois becomes a governing state in the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), a group of states working together to develop a common set of computer-based K-12 assessments for ELA and math that are aligned to the Common Core.

2013

The Board raises the performance level cut scores of the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) to align state assessments with the new learning standards and prepare for the PARCC assessment.

Schools fully implement the new learning standards in ELA and math during the 2013-14 school year.

2014

During the spring, about 500 districts, 1,200 schools and 111,000 students in Illinois participate in PARCC field-testing, which gathers input from teachers and students to identify and correct problems before the assessment’s first official administration.

Students in grades 3-8 take ISATs that are 100 percent written to the new learning standards.

In April, ISBE receives approval for its flexibility waiver to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 in exchange for Illinois’ state-developed plan that includes a new assessment and accountability system.

2015

Students in grades 3-8 and some high school students take the PARCC assessment in both ELA and math.

A more detailed timeline for the new learning standards and PARCC assessment is available at www.isbe.net/assessment/pdfs/parcc/2015/parcc-ils-timeline.pdf.

Additionally, the State Board has hosted more than 50 webinars attended by 12,000 educators during the past two years. Agency staff also developed all of the resources necessary for schools to introduce families to the new assessment system during events called the PARCC Primer and the PARCC Primer: Technology and the Test. The PARCC Primer gives participants an opportunity to take computer-based sample test items, which offer a brief overview of the PARCC assessment and do not generate a score. Students and their families can not only see what the test questions will look like but also practice using the exam's drag and drop, multiple select, calculator and text-highlighting features. Activities and videos are also provided to demonstrate current teaching and learning strategies in English language arts and math. The second format, PARCC Primer: Technology and the Test, provides more emphasis on giving families experience with the PARCC assessment's technological features before having them take an actual practice test, which is lengthier than the sample items and provides test takers with a score.

Wilmette School District 39 parent Erin Stone says she is excited about the benefits of the new PARCC assessment system after learning more about its purpose, capabilities and technology during the district's recent PARCC Primer event for families.

As a former practicing attorney, Stone said she especially appreciates the PARCC assessment's focus on higher-order thinking and real-world application.

"The philosophy behind the exam really resonated with me," said Stone, a mother of a third-grader and a fifth-grader. "I like that it is measuring critical thinking and problem-solving and writing competence for every grade level. The kinds of skills the test is measuring are the kinds of skills I used when practicing law. I could see the application from what I did every day, such as synthesizing information from different sources and supporting conclusions with evidence. I was very happy with that."

Stone appreciates how the exam's features, such as the text highlighter and answer eliminator, are user friendly and should help students avoid selecting incorrect information by mistake. Stone also believes the PARCC assessment's performance results for students will be more valuable than those from the state's previous assessments because they can be directly compared to the results of students around the country.

The PARCC summative assessment is divided into two parts to allow enough time to complete the exam and to measure different kinds of knowledge and skills. The first part is the Performance-Based Assessment (PBA), which will be given when about 75 percent of instruction is completed or mid-March to early April. The PBA portion features more extended tasks and writing exercises. The second part is the End-of-Year (EOY) assessment, which is given when approximately 90 percent of instruction is completed, and will be administered in late April to late May. The EOY is shorter than the PBA and asks students to demonstrate their skills and knowledge by answering computer-based, machine-scorable questions. Together, these two parts emphasize rigor, depth and application of knowledge, not just rote memorization.

The technology-enhanced questions and writing component of the PARCC assessment contribute to slightly more testing time for students than the ISAT and PSAE. Overall test times fluctuate depending on grade level, but the PARCC assessment allots an average of eight to 10 hours, extended over several days and the two separate testing administrations. Most students finished earlier than the allotted time during the PARCC assessment field test in March 2014. Students are expected to spend nearly eight hours on the PARCC exams, depending on grade level. The PARCC exam will account for less than 1 percent of the average amount of instructional time this school year and is the only required assessment in Illinois.

The initial PARCC assessment results will be available to families this fall; however, results in subsequent years will be available almost immediately. This year's results will take a bit longer to provide because this first year of data will be used to set cut scores that determine the performance levels at which students can be deemed "college and career ready." The scores and performance levels will provide a baseline in order to measure growth by students, schools and districts in the future. Illinois students' performance results can be compared directly with their peers across the nation.

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