Fact Sheet: Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers
April 2015
Division of Public Information, Illinois State Board of Education

What is the purpose of the PARCC assessments?
When we learn new material, it is important that we check our understanding and mastery of that material on a regular basis with the appropriate assessment tools. The PARCC assessments are designed to measure learning in relationship to the new Illinois Learning Standards and were built from the ground up to align 100 percent to the standards. The Illinois Learning Standards guide curricula and curricula shapes classroom instruction.

The PARCC assessments will allow us for the first time to directly compare how well Illinois students compare to students in other states against internationally benchmarked standards. PARCC results will be used to measure student growth for school and district accountability, though each district will have to decide how it uses the data internally for instructional improvement. The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) does not dictate the measures a school should use to evaluate teacher effectiveness. This decision is made on a local level by the individual school districts.

Additionally, federal law-- specifically, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) (also known as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2002) -- requires states (including Illinois) to provide for the participation in state tests of all designated students in grades 3-8 and, at least, once in high school. Prior to NCLB certain subgroups of students, including students with disabilities, African American and Latino students and students in poverty, were not included in accountability systems. Many experts feel that among the most important accomplishments of ESEA is the inclusion of all students for accountability purposes and transparency. Ultimately, the assessment of student learning aims to close the achievement gaps among student groups, tailor instruction to meet student needs, and expand opportunity for all students in America.

How was the implementation of PARCC assessments introduced to Illinois public schools?
Illinois took several steps to phase in the new assessment requirements. In 2010, Illinois adopted the new Illinois Learning Standards in English language arts and mathematics. ISBE supported school districts as they began implementing the new standards beginning in 2011, with full implementation scheduled for the 2013-14 school year. During the spring of 2013, about 20 percent of the questions on the ISAT, given to students in grades 3-8, were written to meet the more rigorous benchmarks of the new standards. In spring 2014, 100 percent of the questions were aligned to the new benchmarks. A robust field-testing of the PARCC assessments was conducted in 2014 with about 110,000 students in 500 districts and 1,200 schools. The first statewide operational administration of PARCC assessments was met with minimal implementation issues.

Is too much time being devoted to PARCC assessments?
Testing times for the first initial PARCC assessments in 2014-15 exceed the estimated time that was observed for actual completion of tasks during the field-testing. Generous timeframes ensure all students have adequate time to demonstrate what they know and are still able to review their work without feeling the undue pressure of a time restraint. In total, the percentage of time students will spend taking the PARCC assessments, even if they use the longest times available, will be less than one-tenth of 1 percent of the instructional time of the school year.

These tests are decidedly different than those of the past. PARCC assessments require application of
knowledge and critical thinking. While there may be fewer items, they may contain multiple parts or require more in-depth answers that may take additional time to answer. PARCC assessments also measure writing at all grade levels, a skill that was not routinely tested but is vital to student success.

Following the full administration of PARCC in the spring of 2015, testing time will be re-evaluated.

**Do the PARCC assessments cause undue test anxiety for students?**

It is normal for students to experience some degree of stress and anxiety before and during standardized tests. PARCC assessments are designed to be similar to classroom instruction, which should actually ease anxiety. However, the manner in which the test is presented to students can affect their perception of the test as being "high stakes."

Students often internalize emotions presented by adults. If a teacher or parent is anxious, then the child may likely become anxious. Therefore, it is important for adults to be aware of the emotions they are displaying before and during standardized tests. It is also important that students and school personnel understand that the new assessment will allow for a measure of growth over time rather than a single measure of achievement as has been reported in the past.

**Are students being over-tested?**

Although PARCC assessments are the only tests required by the state, school districts have the authority to make local decisions to implement additional testing instruments. ISBE believes that districts need to carefully consider the assessments currently in use and the types of data that these assessments are providing. We are making resources available to help districts audit their existing assessments to determine if there are duplicative efforts taking place. ISBE is also encouraging districts to consider how they might build balanced assessment systems. Resources to support these efforts are available at [http://www.isbe.net/assessment/htmls/balanced-asmt.htm](http://www.isbe.net/assessment/htmls/balanced-asmt.htm).

**Do students have to take the PARCC assessments?**

There is not a policy in Illinois to “opt out” of standardized testing prior to test administration. However, a student can “refuse” to take a test as the test is about to be administered in the testing environment. Student refusals are problematic because without a test score, the student, the parents and the school do not get an objective measure of how the student is performing against standards. It is important to identify students’ strengths and weaknesses early so that teachers can use that information in the classroom to help students make progress to the next grade level and, ultimately, to be prepared for college and careers after high school graduation.

Data shows that many Illinois students who go on to college are not ready for college-level work and are required to take hours of remedial coursework, which costs time and money. It has also been proven that many of our high school graduates are not ready for the workplace and are having difficulty making the transition into careers. Student refusals may also contribute to subgroups not being assessed, such as black, Hispanic, poor and English language learner students. Federal law requiring that all students be tested is an effort to ensure that schools are, in fact, providing a high-quality education to all of their students, equally.

**When will score reports from the spring 2015 administration of the PARCC assessments be available?**

Spring 2015 was the first full administration of the PARCC assessments and is considered a baseline year for test results. As with any new test, educators must determine proficiency levels and this is a time-consuming process. Therefore, for this year only, scores will not be available immediately. It is estimated that scores will be returned to schools in late fall. In subsequent years, data will be available more quickly. The Performance-Based Assessment contains human- and machine-scored items and is administered first because it requires additional time to score. The second portion of the test, End-of-Year, is entirely machine-scored and is administered later because it takes less time to score. Both portions of the test are required for a student to receive a score.