Sept. 9 Back-to-School Parent Webinar FAQ

PARCC ASSESSMENTS

Q: Which test will students in grades 3-8 take and when?
A: Third- through eighth-graders will take the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) this school year. A Performance-Based Assessment (PBA) will be administered at the point when 75 percent of instruction is complete and an End-of-Year assessment (EOY) will be administered after roughly 90 percent of instruction has been completed. Testing dates will vary between local districts, but dates of the testing windows can be found at http://www.isbe.net/assessment/pdfs/parcc/2015/fact-sheet1408.pdf.

Q: Do teachers have access to practice tests in preparing for the PARCC testing?
A: Sample questions and practice tests are available through the official PARCC website at http://www.parcconline.org/computer-based-samples.

Q: Is PARCC testing aligned to different states' testing?
A: Illinois belongs to a consortium of 12 states and the District of Columbia that is administering the PARCC.

Q: Will the PARCC EOY assessments measure student growth between grades/years? For example, will a student's EOY assessment from fourth grade be an accurate measure of growth when compared to the same student's third-grade EOY assessment?
A: Yes. A student's trajectory toward college and career readiness can be plotted over time. The summative assessment score (combination of PBA and EOY) will render a Performance-Level Descriptor (PLD) level, which may be compared over time. Here are links to two documents around the PLD policy documents that may be helpful:
http://www.parcconline.org/sites/parcc/files/PARCCCRDPolicyandPLDs_FINAL_0.pdf
Q: What are the options in Illinois to opt out of the testing?
A: There is not an option for public school students to opt out of state assessments in Illinois.

Q: Where can we find a listing of which educators were involved in the PARCC assessment development?
A: Contact PARCC for an up-to-date list of which educators have been involved with the development of the assessment at http://www.parcconline.org/contact.

Q: What about schools that do not currently have the technological capacity to administer PARCC online?
A: Schools in Illinois can administer the PARCC via paper and pencil this year if sufficient technology is not available. The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) is looking for ways to support more online instruction. That is the first priority, with online testing being a natural second step.

Q: Will the state financially support technology improvements in those schools that cannot currently administer these tests on online?
A: The state is looking for ways to support schools and districts so that eventually all students have access to both online instruction and online assessments.

Q: Will the PARCC be recognized by institutions of higher education?
A: While the assessment is not intended to replace college entrance exams, it may be used by institutions to provide evidence for direct placement into credit-bearing coursework.

Q: Who pays for the paper-and-pencil version of the testing – the cost of the tests and scoring them? Does the state pick up that tab or does the district pay?
A: The state covers the cost of state-required assessments.

Q: Does this test affect promotion policies to the next grade?
A: No, promotion to the next grade is a local district decision.

Q: Who will score written answers on PARCC? Will they be scored by humans or will computers score essays and short answer questions?
A: Human scorers will score 100 percent of written English language arts (ELA) answers in the first operational year. In subsequent years, responses will be scored using a combination of human and computer scorers.
Q: My district has scheduled the PBA testing window to begin at around 60 percent of the school year, not the recommended 75 percent. The EOY window begins at 80 percent of the school year. Does ISBE approve of a schedule like this? How much room for variation is there with the testing window?
A: Given the logistics of scheduling and the fact that testing windows span four-week periods, it is likely that in any given district some students will test slightly earlier or later than the recommended times. The Illinois windows were established to coincide with starting dates to approximate when students would be hitting 75 percent and 90 percent of instruction, respectively. However, given the individual nature of school calendars, there are situations where students will begin testing at less than 75 percent and 90 percent of instruction. It is not expected that this will cause a significant impact, provided that the standards are being addressed in regular instruction. This is not the sort of assessment for which test prep is recommended. The best preparation is receiving good standards-aligned instruction on a daily basis.

Q: Why can't parents have copies of their student's assessments?
A: There are multiple forms of each assessment and these contain embedded field testing for subsequent tests. Releasing every form would hinder future development and it would compromise the security of items. However, there is a recognition that parents, educators and students need to better understand the performance of students by viewing actual items and student responses. To that end, PARCC is committed to the annual release of a portion of the items at each grade level to allow for the assessment to provide the type of insight into student performance that can best guide learning.

Q: What format will the questions on the math portion of the PARCC be in?
A: There are several types of math items. One aim of the PARCC assessment is to measure the depth of student knowledge and not merely the breadth. Students are asked in some instances to demonstrate their understanding by solving items without a proposed solution. Multiple ways of solving problems are valued and students are provided with opportunities to demonstrate their work using words, numbers and/or symbols. It is not presumed that every student will approach every problem the same way and one approach is not valued over another. Some problems will simply ask for a correct answer and some will ask for justification of that answer. Some questions may ask a student to select multiple correct solutions. You can access sample tests at http://www.parcconline.org.

Q: What can I do at home to support the use of technology for PARCC and also support critical thinking skills?
A: Our goal is for students to first have access to online instruction, then online testing. Parents can show students the sample PARCC questions, but the best preparation tips can be found via some of the Illinois and National PTA materials cited during our webinar as well as by talking with your local teachers and school leaders.

Q: How will PARCC assessment work for students who finished Algebra II in previous years, but are now finally in 11th grade and would normally take the Prairie State Achievement Examination this year? Do they take PARCC this year for both math and ELA?
A: If students have previously completed Algebra II, they will not be required to take PARCC Algebra II. If they are in a course covering the standards of ELA III, they would take the ELA III assessment. In high school, the assessments are at end of course, so students may participate in one content test, both content tests or neither, depending on which courses they are currently taking.

Q: How much classroom time will be devoted to test taking and preparation for test taking?
A: That is a local decision, but this is a test aligned to the new standards. That means that it should reflect everyday classroom instructional work.

Q: When will the high school students take the PARCC test?
A: Testing dates will vary somewhat by district. Four-week testing windows can be found at http://www.isbe.net/assessment/pdfs/parcc/2015/fact-sheet1408.pdf.

Q: Which students will take the PARCC this year?
A: All Illinois public school students in grades 3-8 and those enrolled in certain high school courses will take the PARCC assessment beginning this year.

Q: When will student PARCC results be released?
A: In this first operational year, the standard setting will occur in late summer 2015, which means that results from the spring 2015 administration of the PARCC will be available to districts by fall 2015. In the future, it is anticipated that summative assessment results will be available prior to the end of the school year. Districts may have the opportunity to use interim assessments and results from such tests will be available in a timelier manner.

Q: Why is science no longer included in testing?
A: Illinois approved new science standards this year and we expect to offer an assessment tied to these standards within the next several years.
Q: If PARCC is aligned to the Illinois Learning Standards based on the Common Core, why wouldn't EOY assessments be used for promotion/retention decisions?
A: The PARCC is just one assessment system. The decision to promote or not promote a student is a local decision that should be based on multiple factors.

Q: Since the answers will now need to reflect a deeper understanding of texts, I’m curious how they will be graded. It seems that the answers will be so wide-ranging and open to interpretation. I would imagine that the grading will need to be completely different and much more subjective. Can you address how this will be implemented?
A: There are rubrics and scoring guides created to address this very issue. The process of using rubrics and training sets around those rubrics is intended to standardize what would otherwise be a highly subjective process. Scorers are trained and monitored to ensure that they are maintaining consistency and reliability with other scorers. When there is variance, the responses are rescored and the scorers are retrained and released if they are unable to retrain appropriately.

Q: What was the age group and demographics of those participating in the PARCC field testing?
A: Roughly 500 districts, 1,200 schools and more than 110,000 students in Illinois took part in PARCC field testing in spring 2014. The test takers and schools represented the diversity of Illinois' more than 4,000 schools and 2 million students.

Illinois Learning Standards

Q: I understand the importance of group work in the classroom and how it applies to eventually joining the workforce. Will the Illinois Learning Standards allow for time for introverted students to process, experiment and reason independently?
A: The standards set learning expectations by grade level, but local teachers and school principals determine curriculum and instructional approaches to best reach each student.

Q: Will dual credit for high school student be across the state now with these Common Core standards or still district-based?
A: No, these are still district-based decisions.

Q: How well have teachers been trained to teach these new standards?
A: Professional development needs vary; some teachers may have already been implementing curriculum and instructional approaches to meet the standards when they were adopted in 2010. Others have worked with their colleagues within their schools and districts and/or taken workshops offered through the state and other entities to better prepare themselves to teach to the standards.

Q: Are the new Illinois standards the same as the state Common Core standards?

Q: What kinds of parent and teacher resources are out there for the Illinois Learning Standards and children with Individualized Education Programs (IEP) and disabilities?
A: The Special Education Services includes a link to Dynamic Learning Maps at http://www.isbe.net/assessment/dlm.htm. For teachers and parents, there are resources available at www.isbe.net/common_core under the Professional Learning series and “Parent Resources” located on the right under the section titled “Hot off the Press.”

**ILLINOIS HOUSE BILL 3700 (HB 3700)**

Q: Does HB 3700 change the special education eligibility status for students with dyslexia?
A: The process to determine eligibility for special education services remains the same. If appropriate, an evaluation would be completed and a team would make a determination as to whether a student has a disability that adversely affects his/her education and requires special education services.

Q: How does the state plan to start implementing HB 3700?
A: Rulemaking to incorporate an international definition of dyslexia into rules governing Special Education (23 Ill. Adm. Code 226), as per the requirement of P.A. 98-705, are expected to be brought to ISBE for its initial review within the next six months.

Q: Since dyslexia is now identified by law as a learning disability, what steps have been taken to accommodate those students? Many students need an IEP to receive services, but our schools will not administer the testing for students who have severe reading problems with the written language.
A: This act does not identify the diagnosis of dyslexia as a learning disability. Rather, this particular act includes the following requirements:
This agency is required to adopt rules in order to incorporate “an international definition of dyslexia” within the existing provisions of the state special education regulations.

This agency would be required to establish an advisory group to develop training module(s) specific to multisensory, systematic and sequential instruction in reading.

The intent of these training modules is to provide education and professional development for teachers, school administrators and other education professionals. Per the content of the legislation, this activity is subject to specific state appropriations or the availability of private donations. This bill raises awareness for the importance of dyslexia identification and the need for effective interventions.

Q: Who is on the committee that is in the process of developing methods and ways to help work with students who have dyslexia? What are the credentials of the committee members?
A: As noted above, currently this agency is in the process of implementing the requirements of this act (i.e., adoption of rules and plans for the identified advisory group). However, such activities have not yet been finalized. The goal is to create a multidisciplinary group to develop a comprehensive framework in creating training modules and identifying evidence/research-based interventions and approaches to address the needs of students with dyslexia.

OTHER

Q: Will the webinar be posted online? How can other parents gain access to this presentation?

Q: Where can I go to learn the new math methods, such as the long division one that was demonstrated?
A: The new standards have been posted on the ISBE website since they were adopted in 2010. You can find a host of resources related to the standards on the ISBE site at http://www.isbe.net/common_core/default.htm. Additionally, we recommend other sites on our fact sheets regarding the new standards as well as our fact sheet on family engagement.

Q: How often will parents be informed as to testing and results?
A: The window for PARCC testing has been posted on the ISBE website since early August at [http://www.isbe.net/assessment/pdfs/2015/assessment-dates-14-15.pdf](http://www.isbe.net/assessment/pdfs/2015/assessment-dates-14-15.pdf) and we have shared those dates with Illinois school districts.

**Q:** What can parents do at home to help promote more successful outcomes?
A: Some tips on family engagement are shared on our Hot Topics page at [http://www.isbe.net/hot-topics.htm](http://www.isbe.net/hot-topics.htm).

**Q:** Why do you have to explain this process to parents via the Internet as opposed to face-to-face meetings?
A: State Superintendent Christopher Koch wanted to try and reach as many parents as possible and a webinar is one means of meeting that goal. Superintendent Koch and other ISBE staff members work with local districts, but the best source for this information remains your local districts. We have communicated these initiatives to them for the past several years. Additionally, the State Board of Education holds public meetings each month throughout the state. Meeting dates and agendas are always shared with statewide media and school districts and posted on ISBE's website and at our offices.

**Q:** Why is MAP testing mandatory for my child's school?
A: The best person to answer that question is your local school principal or district superintendent.

**Q:** Do parents have a choice of which public school to send their child to?
A: Public School Choice is no longer available since we received a waiver from the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. If a student had moved to a new school prior to this school year, when the waiver went into effect, he/she could remain there.

**Q:** How will college and career readiness be assessed?
A: At the state level, college and career readiness will be assessed through administration of the PARCC. Local districts can and do measure readiness through a variety of other metrics.

**Q:** The questions on the 5Essentials parent survey are geared more toward those with elementary-age children. Are there any plans to modify the survey and/or offer a separate one that would be more relevant for parents with high school students?
A: Not at this time. Districts can administer the survey, which is optional.

**Q:** What is the time frame for providing input to the draft family engagement standards?
A: A survey is available at https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1Lm7RyloxiRNNfC7wnrs4muwx8SAFyv27XmbpFH3z_g/viewform

Feedback received prior to Oct. 1 will be used to inform the final version of the framework.

Q: Do we know how many schools in Illinois have no air conditioners in the classrooms?
A: No, the state does not track this information.

Q: Who determines which grade level foreign language classes are first offered?
A: Local districts and their locally elected school boards.

Q: How can parents support schools in less affluent areas?

Q: I understand the need to adjust teaching methods for kids with special needs, but what is being done for the kids who need more challenge? Is there any lobbying being done for state-level improvements in gifted programs, which I believe are currently not funded at all at the state level?
A: A Gifted Advisory Council continues to meet and discuss statewide issues surrounding serving gifted and talented children. The K-12 State Education budget endured more than $700 million in cuts since fiscal year 2009. The Council meeting dates are posted here: http://www.isbe.net/GAC/default.htm. The next meeting is scheduled for 10 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. at the Illinois State Board of Education offices in Springfield; 100 N. 1st Street, Springfield, IL 62777 • 866/262-6663 • 217/782-4321 • Directions and Chicago; 100 W. Randolph, Suite 14-300 • Chicago, IL 60601 • 312/814-2220 • Directions