



Frequently Asked Questions about the PARCC Score Release

Compiled by the Illinois P20 Council's Data, Assessment & Accountability Committee

Why New Assessments, Why Now?

- The Illinois State Board of Education adopted the new Illinois Learning Standards five years ago that make clear what students should know and be able to do in math and English Language Arts at a time when college and career readiness matters more than ever. The new standards draw from the Common Core State Standards.

When we change the standards that guide instruction, we need a new way to answer the question every parent asks: How is my child doing? The new state assessments help us answer that question.

- The new Illinois assessment called PARCC – the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers – reflects the new standards that guide instruction. It measures math and English Language Arts in grades three through eight and high school, and gives a sense for how Illinois students perform relative to their peers in other states.
- PARCC is not an additional state test. Rather, it replaces some of the old state tests, the ISAT in grades 3 through 8 and the PSAE in high school. A college entrance exam will continue to be available as part of the state assessment system.

What do the new standards ask of students?

- The Illinois Learning Standards based on the Common Core began with the end in mind: Ensuring all students have the math and English Language Arts skills to prepare them for college and a career.
- The new standards aim to equip students with important skills and knowledge, such as the ability to communicate, think critically and reason through complex problems. While this does not capture life skills like grit and perseverance, the standards aim to give all students the opportunity to be successful in college and careers.
- In English Language Arts, the standards challenge students to read complex text, draw comparisons across fiction and nonfiction alike and write often. For instance, students are encouraged to: “Read like a detective, write like a reporter!”
- In math, the standards create a deeper focus on fewer concepts, emphasizing math reasoning alongside math calculations. For instance, students do not just memorize formulas, but instead develop a deeper understanding of numbers and their properties.

What Should We Expect When Results Are Released?

- This is a new test with new expectations. The results will look different, and likely will be lower. But lower results do not mean your child suddenly knows less. Rather, it means we are measuring something we never have before.
- This is a transition year. The results will serve as a new baseline to measure student progress, and will not be used for accountability.
- The PARCC results are just one measure of how your student performs in English Language Arts and math. It gives a starting point to improve instruction in these two subjects. But it cannot capture the fullness of your child’s potential or the breadth of their abilities.

How Will the New Assessments Serve Students?

- The new assessment provides comparability – that is, students will see how their performance in English Language Arts and math compares with their peers in other states.
- In the future, students may be able to place directly into credit-bearing college courses based on their high school results on PARCC, bypassing remediation and saving money.

How Do the New Assessments Support Teaching and Learning?

- Illinois educators had a hand in creating the assessment. In fact, teachers across the educational system logged roughly 20,000 hours in reviewing sample items and giving feedback, according to PARCC.
- More than 80 Illinois higher education faculty played a leading role in the development of the assessment, tightening the link between K12 and postsecondary.
- PARCC is more than a test, but rather a system of resources that includes formative measures, item banks and diagnostic tools that give high-quality information about student performance. In the future, these can give teachers meaningful information on where their students stand and where they might focus improvement efforts.

What Will PARCC Tell Us?

- How students – by child, by income level and by racial or ethnic group – progress from one level to the next, developing the know-how and skills that can help them be successful after high school.
- How teachers might adjust their instruction based upon how students are learning.
- How students perform in English Language Arts and math with meaningful, high-quality information about how they are progressing toward college and career readiness. This is a new baseline.