



## 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://parconline.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>.



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## TALKING POINTS

# Why the PARCC is a Meaningful and Useful Assessment System

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### Basic Info

- Illinois schools will administer new assessments created through the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) in spring 2015. These assessments are fully aligned to the K-12 Illinois Learning Standards in English language arts and mathematics and emphasize academic rigor, critical thinking, problem solving and college and career readiness for all students.
- Educators from K-12 and higher education representatives, helped develop the PARCC assessments, which are grounded in evidence to support college and career readiness.

### Why it's important

- The new assessments reflect classroom lessons and experiences. Students must analyze information and explain their answers.
- The PARCC assessments take advantage of technology to include questions and other tasks that emulate the type of work that students will encounter in their classrooms on a regular basis and after high school. These assessments help to encourage schools to use technology as a day-to-day tool to enhance learning.
- The multistate test offers a common metric for both educators and policymakers to gauge student performance on a level playing field. The state and local districts will continue to monitor other metrics such as student and school progress, attendance and graduation rates, school climate and learning conditions.
- This first year testing will take place in the spring with two parts or components of a summative assessment: a Performance-Based Assessment (PBA) and an End of Year (EOY) assessment. The PBA component of the PARCC requires that students demonstrate their knowledge and skills through extended tasks and take the PBA when approximately 75 percent of instruction has been completed. Students take the second

part, or EOY, at approximately the point when 90 percent of instruction has been completed. The EOY is composed of shorter, machine-scored questions.

- Note these are not two separate tests but two parts (PBA and EOY) of one summative assessment and are not intended to measure the growth or academic progress gained from one part to the other. Instead, growth will be shown when compared to prior years and when other PARCC assessments become available.

### **How budget restrictions have affected PARCC**

- While PARCC offers assessments aligned to numerous high school level courses, budget constraints have limited which ones can be offered to Illinois districts for the upcoming year. Assessments aligned with courses containing the standards for Algebra II, Integrated Math III and English language arts III will be fully funded by the state, while end-of-course aligned tests for English language arts I and II as well as Algebra I and Geometry will have to be put on hold.
- The state budget appropriated \$9.9 million less for assessments than the Illinois State Board of Education's (ISBE) original recommendation of \$54.5 million for the upcoming year.
- The state will still cover the cost of all districts that want to provide the ACT+ Writing and WorkKeys as we transition to the PARCC and still provide resources for a partial PARCC rollout at the high school level.

### **How this affects the ACT**

- The ACT will still be offered alongside the PARCC by the state at no cost to schools or districts for this school year.
- The State Board listened and responded to local educators and administrators. We heard that there is value for the ACT administration and that students and families want the option of taking the ACT during a statewide test administration. We will be transitioning to a full implementation of PARCC at the high school level.
- If a district chooses not to administer the ACT, 11<sup>th</sup>-grade students will make the choice individually as to whether or not they will take the test on a national testing day. The dates are available on both the ISBE and ACT websites.
- ACT offers fee waivers for students from low-income families. In the future, Illinois will also help cover the cost of the ACT for students from low-income families who want take the test.

### **How this affects WorkKeys**

- The state will provide all of the WorkKeys subtests that can lead to earning the National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC). These are: Reading for Information, Applied Mathematics and Locating Information.

- A district may decide to give the WorkKeys to all students in the district.
- A given district may also elect to not administer the WorkKeys.
- A district may also decide to give the WorkKeys at select high schools. Students at some high schools may need or want the NCRC while other students may not see the need for this certification. Statewide administration of the WorkKeys will take place on March 4.

### **Field testing and transition info**

- About 500 districts, 1,200 schools and 110,888 students in Illinois took part in PARCC field testing in spring 2014. The field test was a “practice run” to gather input from teachers and students and to identify and correct problems with this assessment system before its first official administration in spring 2015. As a result, students did not receive individual test scores.
- Two thirds of students who participated in PARCC field testing in spring 2014 reported that they prefer the online tests to a paper and pencil version.
- Results from the field test survey show that the majority of educators indicated that the supporting materials should be clearer but that preparation for administration was possible within given time constraints.
- The PARCC field testing has led to a number of improvements. For example, the PARCC Consortium learned about issues with logging out of the assessments and have also reviewed the necessary time allotment for some of the assessments. Field testing gave students and administrators some familiarity and experience with these new assessments.
- More than half of all Illinois schools are expected to administer the PARCC online in spring 2015. The ultimate goal is that all schools will eventually administer the PARCC online. ISBE recognizes, however, that not every school currently has this capacity.
- As schools continue to update their equipment and infrastructure, PARCC will be available as a paper-based test for schools that lack the capacity needed to test online. Implementation of computer-based testing may not occur all at one time across a district, or even within a building. There will be some buildings that will have the capability to test some grade levels (grades 3-8) or content areas (high school) online, and will need to test other grade levels or content areas in the same building using a pencil/paper format.
- To determine which method students will use to take the test, districts are completing a technology readiness tool and submitting to ISBE in early September so that the state agency can plan and budget for the proper number of online and paper and pencil tests. The paper and pencil tests cost approximately \$10 more per test.

- ISBE will continue to explore ways to generate funding and support districts as they make the transition to increased online learning and full online PARCC participation in the future.

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