

Common Core: Frequently Asked Questions

Overview

What are educational standards?

Educational standards are the learning goals for what students should know and be able to do at each grade level. Educational standards help teachers ensure their students have the skills and knowledge they need to be successful, while also helping parents understand what is expected of their children.

What is the Common Core?

State education chiefs and governors in 48 states came together to develop the Common Core, a set of clear college- and career-ready standards for kindergarten through 12th grade in English language arts/literacy and mathematics. Today, 43 states have voluntarily adopted and are working to implement the standards, which are designed to ensure that students graduating from high school are prepared to take credit bearing introductory courses in two- or four-year college programs or enter the workforce.

Who led the development of the Common Core State Standards?

The nation's governors and education commissioners, through their representative organizations, the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), led the development of the Common Core State Standards and continue to lead the initiative. Teachers, parents, school administrators, and experts from across the country, together with state leaders, provided input into the development of the standards. The actual implementation of the Common Core, including how the standards are taught, the curriculum developed, and the materials used to support teachers as they help students reach the standards, is led entirely at the state and local levels.

Were teachers involved in the creation of the standards?

Yes. Teachers have been a critical voice in the development of the standards. The Common Core State Standards drafting process relied on teachers and standards experts from across the country. Teachers were involved in the development process in four ways:

1. They served on the Work Groups and Feedback Groups for the ELA and math standards.
2. The National Education Association (NEA), American Federation of Teachers (AFT), National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM), and National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), among other organizations were instrumental in bringing together teachers to provide specific, constructive feedback on the standards
3. Teachers were members of teams states convened to provide regular feedback on drafts of the standards.
4. Teachers provided input on the Common Core State Standards during the two public comment periods.

Why are the Common Core State Standards important?

High standards that are consistent across states provide teachers, parents, and students with a set of clear expectations to ensure that all students have the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in college, career, and life upon graduation from high school, regardless of where they live. These standards are aligned to the expectations of colleges, workforce training programs, and employers. The standards promote equity by ensuring all students are well prepared to collaborate and compete with their peers in the United States and abroad. Unlike previous state standards, which varied widely from state to state, the Common Core enables collaboration among states on a range of tools and policies, including the:

- Development of textbooks, digital media, and other teaching materials
- Development and implementation of common comprehensive assessment systems that replace existing state testing systems in order to measure student performance annually and provide teachers with specific feedback to help ensure students are on the path to success
- Development of tools and other supports to help educators and schools ensure all students are able to learn the new standards

Who was involved in the development of the Common Core State Standards?

States across the country collaborated with teachers, researchers, and leading experts to design and develop the Common Core State Standards. Each state independently made the decision to adopt the Common Core. Local teachers, principals, and superintendents lead the implementation of the Common Core in their states. The federal government was not involved in the development of the standards.

What guidance do the Common Core State Standards provide to teachers?

The Common Core State Standards are a clear set of shared goals and expectations for the knowledge and skills students need in English language arts and mathematics at each grade level so they can be prepared to succeed in college, career, and life. The standards establish what students need to learn, but they do not dictate how teachers should teach. Teachers will devise their own lesson plans and curriculum, and tailor their instruction to the individual needs of the students in their classrooms.

How do the Common Core State Standards compare to previous state education standards?

The Common Core was developed by building on the best state standards in the United States; examining the expectations of other high-performing countries around the world; and carefully studying the research and literature available on what students need to know and be able to do to be successful in college, career, and life. No state was asked to lower their expectations for students in adopting the Common Core. The evidence-based standards were developed in consultation with teachers and parents from across the country, so they are also realistic and practical for the classroom.

Key Shifts in Mathematics

Introduction

The Common Core State Standards for Mathematics build on the best of existing standards and reflect the skills and knowledge students will need to succeed in college, career, and life. Understanding how the standards differ from previous standards—and the necessary shifts they call for—is essential to implementing them.

The following are the key shifts called for by the Common Core:

1. Greater focus on fewer topics

The Common Core calls for greater focus in mathematics. Rather than racing to cover many topics in a mile-wide, inch-deep curriculum, the standards ask math teachers to significantly narrow and deepen the way time and energy are spent in the classroom. This means focusing deeply on the major work of each grade as follows:

- In grades K–2: Concepts, skills, and problem solving related to addition and subtraction
- In grades 3–5: Concepts, skills, and problem solving related to multiplication and division of whole numbers and fractions
- In grade 6: Ratios and proportional relationships, and early algebraic expressions and equations
- In grade 7: Ratios and proportional relationships, and arithmetic of rational numbers
- In grade 8: Linear algebra and linear functions

This focus will help students gain strong foundations, including a solid understanding of concepts, a high degree of procedural skill and fluency, and the ability to apply the math they know to solve problems inside and outside the classroom.

2. Coherence: Linking topics and thinking across grades

Mathematics is not a list of disconnected topics, tricks, or mnemonics; it is a coherent body of knowledge made up of interconnected concepts. Therefore, the standards are designed around coherent progressions from grade to grade. Learning is carefully connected across grades so that students can build new understanding onto foundations built in previous years. For example, in 4th grade, students must “apply and extend previous understandings of multiplication to multiply a fraction by a whole number” (Standard 4.NF.4). This extends to 5th grade, when students are expected to build on that skill to “apply and extend previous understandings of multiplication to multiply a fraction or whole number by a fraction” (Standard 5.NF.4). Each standard is not a new event, but an extension of previous learning.

Coherence is also built into the standards in how they reinforce a major topic in a grade by utilizing supporting, complementary topics. For example, instead of presenting the topic of data displays as an end in itself, the topic is used to support grade-level word problems in which students apply mathematical skills to solve problems.

3. Rigor: Pursue conceptual understanding, procedural skills and fluency, and application with equal intensity

Rigor refers to deep, authentic command of mathematical concepts, not making math harder or introducing topics at earlier grades. To help students meet the standards, educators will need to pursue, with equal intensity, three aspects of rigor in the major work of each grade: conceptual understanding, procedural skills and fluency, and application.

Conceptual understanding: The standards call for conceptual understanding of key concepts, such as place value and ratios. Students must be able to access concepts from a number of perspectives in order to see math as more than a set of mnemonics or discrete procedures.

Procedural skills and fluency: The standards call for speed and accuracy in calculation. Students must practice core functions, such as single-digit multiplication, in order to have access to more complex concepts and procedures. Fluency must be addressed in the classroom or through supporting materials, as some students might require more practice than others.

Application: The standards call for students to use math in situations that require mathematical knowledge. Correctly applying mathematical knowledge depends on students having a solid conceptual understanding and procedural fluency.

Shifts in English Language Arts

Introduction

The Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy build on the best of existing standards and reflect the skills and knowledge students will need to succeed in college, career, and life. Understanding how the standards differ from previous standards—and the necessary shifts they call for—is essential to implementing the standards well.

The following are key shifts called for by the Common Core:

1. Regular practice with complex texts and their academic language

Rather than focusing solely on the skills of reading and writing, the ELA/literacy standards highlight the growing complexity of the texts students must read to be ready for the demands of college, career, and life. The standards call for a staircase of increasing complexity so that all students are ready for the demands of college- and career-level reading no later than the end of high school. The standards also outline a progressive development of reading comprehension so that students advancing through the grades are able to gain more from what they read.

Closely related to text complexity and inextricably connected to reading comprehension is a focus on academic vocabulary: words that appear in a variety of content areas (such as *ignite* and *commit*). The standards call for students to grow their vocabularies through a mix of conversation, direct instruction, and reading. They ask students to determine word meanings, appreciate the nuances of words, and steadily expand their range of words and phrases. Vocabulary and conventions are treated in their own strand not because skills in these areas should be handled in isolation, but because their use extends across reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

Because the standards are the roadmap for successful classrooms, and recognizing that teachers, school districts, and states need to decide on the journey to the destination, they intentionally do not include a required reading list. Instead, they include numerous sample texts to help teachers prepare for the school year and allow parents and students to know what to expect during the year.

The standards include certain critical types of content for all students, including classic myths and stories from around the world, foundational U.S. documents, seminal works of American literature, and the writings of Shakespeare. The standards appropriately defer the majority of decisions about what and how to teach to states, districts, schools, and teachers.

2. Reading, writing, and speaking grounded in evidence from texts, both literary and informational

The Common Core emphasizes using evidence from texts to present careful analyses, well-defended claims, and clear information. Rather than asking students questions they can answer solely from their prior knowledge and experience, the standards call for students to answer questions that depend on their having read the texts with care.

The reading standards focus on students' ability to read carefully and grasp information, arguments, ideas, and details based on evidence in the text. Students should be able to answer a range of *text-dependent* questions, whose answers require inferences based on careful attention to the text.

Frequently, forms of writing in K–12 have drawn heavily from student experience and opinion, which alone will not prepare students for the demands of college, career, and life. Though the standards still expect narrative writing throughout the grades, they also expect a command of sequence and detail that are essential for effective argumentative and informative writing. The standards' focus on evidence-based writing along with the ability to inform and persuade is a significant shift from current practice.

3. Building knowledge through content-rich nonfiction

Students must be immersed in information about the world around them if they are to develop the strong general knowledge and vocabulary they need to become successful readers and be prepared for college, career, and life. Informational texts play an important part in building students' content knowledge. Further, it is vital for students to have extensive opportunities to build knowledge through texts so they can learn independently.

In K-5, fulfilling the standards requires a 50-50 balance between informational and literary reading. Informational reading includes content-rich nonfiction in history/social studies, sciences, technical studies, and the arts. The K-5 standards strongly recommend that texts—both within and across grades—be selected to support students in systematically developing knowledge about the world.

In grades 6-12, there is much greater attention on the specific category of literary nonfiction, which is a shift from traditional standards. To be clear, the standards pay substantial attention to literature throughout K-12, as it constitutes half of the reading in K-5 and is the core of the work of 6-12 ELA teachers. Also in grades 6-12, the standards for literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects ensure that students can independently build knowledge in these disciplines through reading and writing. Reading, writing, speaking, and listening should span the school day from K-12 as integral parts of every subject.

Myths vs. Facts

Successful implementation of the Common Core State Standards requires parents, educators, policymakers, and other stakeholders to have the facts about what the standards are and what they are not. The following myths and facts aim to address common misconceptions about the development, intent, content, and implementation of the standards.

Myths About Content and Quality: General

Myth: Adopting common standards means bringing all states' standards down to the lowest common denominator. This means that states with high standards are actually taking a step backwards by adopting the Common Core.

Fact: The standards are designed to build upon the most advanced current thinking about preparing all students for success in college, career, and life. This will result in moving even the best state standards to the next level. In fact, since this work began, there has been an explicit agreement that no state would lower its standards. The standards were informed by the best in the country, the highest international standards, and evidence and expertise about educational outcomes. We need college- and career-ready standards because even in high-performing states, students are graduating and passing all the required tests but still need remediation in their postsecondary work.

Myth: The Common Core State Standards are not internationally benchmarked.

Fact: Standards from top-performing countries played a significant role in the development of the math and English language arts/literacy standards. In fact, the college- and career-ready standards provide an appendix listing the evidence that was consulted in drafting the standards, including the international standards that were consulted in the development process.

Myth: The standards only include skills and do not address the importance of content knowledge.

Fact: The standards recognize that both content and skills are important.

The English language arts standards require certain critical content for all students, including classic myths and stories from around the world, America's founding documents, foundational American literature, and Shakespeare. Appropriately, the remaining crucial decisions about what content should be taught are made at the state and local levels. In addition to content coverage, the standards require that students systematically acquire knowledge in literature and other disciplines through reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

The mathematics standards lay a solid foundation in whole numbers, addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, fractions, and decimals. Taken together, these elements support a student's ability to learn and apply more demanding math concepts and procedures. The middle school and high school standards call on students to practice applying mathematical ways of thinking to real-world issues and challenges. They prepare students to think and reason mathematically. The standards set a rigorous definition of college and career readiness not by piling topic upon topic, but by demanding that students develop a depth of understanding and ability to apply mathematics to novel situations, as college students and employees regularly do.

Myths About Content and Quality: Math

Myth: The standards do not prepare or require students to learn algebra in the 8th grade, as many states' current standards do.

Fact: The standards do accommodate and prepare students for Algebra 1 in 8th grade by including the prerequisites for this course in grades K-7. Students who master the K-7 material will be able to take Algebra 1 in 8th grade. At the same time, grade 8 standards also include rigorous algebra and will transition students effectively into a full Algebra 1 course.

Myth: Key math topics are missing or appear in the wrong grade.

Fact: The mathematical progressions presented in the Common Core State Standards are coherent and based on evidence.

Part of the problem with having different sets of state standards in mathematics is that different states cover different topics at different grade levels. Coming to a consensus guarantees that, from the viewpoint of any given state, topics will move up or down in the grade level sequence. What is important to keep in mind is that the progression in the Common Core State Standards is mathematically coherent and leads to college and career readiness at an internationally competitive level.

Myths About Content and Quality: English Language Arts/Literacy

Myth: The standards are just vague descriptions of skills and do not include a reading list or any other reference to content.

Fact: The standards do include sample texts that demonstrate the level of text complexity appropriate for the grade level and compatible with the learning demands set out in the standards. The exemplars of high-quality texts at each grade level provide a rich set of possibilities and have been very well received. This provides a reference point for teachers when selecting their texts, along with the flexibility to make their own decisions about what texts to use.

Myth: English teachers will be asked to teach science and social studies reading materials.

Fact: With the ELA standards, English teachers will still teach their students literature as well as literary nonfiction. However, because college and career readiness overwhelmingly focuses on complex texts outside of literature, these standards also ensure students are being prepared to read, write, and research across the curriculum, including in history and science. These goals can be achieved by ensuring that teachers in other disciplines are also focusing on reading and writing to build knowledge within their subject areas.

Myth: The standards do not have enough emphasis on fiction/literature.

Fact: The Common Core requires certain critical content for all students, including classic myths and stories from around the world, America's founding documents, foundational American literature, and Shakespeare. Appropriately, the remaining crucial decisions about what content should be taught are made at the state and local levels. The standards require that a portion of what is read in high school should be informational text, yet the bulk of this portion will be accounted for in non-ELA disciplines that do not frequently use fictional texts. This means that stories, drama, poetry, and other literature account for the majority of reading that students will do in their ELA classes. In addition to content coverage, the standards require that students systematically acquire knowledge in literature and other disciplines through reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

Myths About Process

Myth: No teachers were involved in writing the standards.

Fact: The Common Core drafting process relied on teachers and standards experts from across the country. In addition, many state experts came together to create the most thoughtful and transparent process of standard setting. This was only made possible by many states working together.

Myth: The standards are not based on research or evidence.

Fact: The standards have made careful use of a large and growing body of evidence. The evidence base includes scholarly research, surveys on what skills are required of students entering college and workforce training programs, assessment data identifying college- and career-ready performance, and comparisons to standards from high-performing states and nations.

In English language arts, the standards build on the firm foundation of the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) frameworks in reading and writing, which draw on extensive scholarly research and evidence.

In mathematics, the standards draw on conclusions from the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and other studies of high-performing countries that

found the traditional U.S. mathematics curriculum needed to become substantially more coherent and focused in order to improve student achievement, addressing the problem of a curriculum that is “a mile wide and an inch deep.”

Myths About Implementation

Myth: The standards tell teachers what to teach.

Fact: Teachers know best about what works in the classroom. That is why these standards establish what students need to learn but do not dictate how teachers should teach. Instead, schools and teachers will decide how best to help students reach the standards.

Myth: Teachers will be left to implement the standards without any support or guidance.

Fact: Decisions on how to implement the standards are made at the state and local levels. As such, states and localities are taking different approaches to implementing the standards and providing their teachers with the supports they need to help students successfully reach the standards. To learn how states are supporting teachers and implementing their new standards, visit the Standards in Your State section for a map linking to the state-specific implementation page.

Myth: The standards will be implemented through No Child Left Behind (NCLB), signifying that the federal government will be leading them.

Fact: The Common Core is a state-led effort that is not part of No Child Left Behind or any other federal initiative. The federal government played no role in the development of the Common Core. State adoption of the standards is in no way mandatory. States began the work to create clear, consistent standards before the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, which provided funding for the Race to the Top grant program. It also began before the Elementary and Secondary Education Act blueprint was released, because this work is being driven by the needs of the states, not the federal government. Learn more about the development process [here](#).

Myth: The Common Core State Standards were adopted by states as part of the Race to the Top grant program.

Fact: Recognizing the strength of having high standards for all students, the federal government gave competitive advantage to Race to the Top applicants that demonstrated that they had or planned to adopt college- and career-ready standards for all students. The program did not specify the Common Core or prevent states from creating their own, separate college- and career-ready standards. States and territories voluntarily chose to adopt the Common Core to prepare their students for college, career, and life. Many states that were not chosen for Race to the Top grants continue to implement the Common Core.

Myth: These standards amount to a national curriculum for our schools.

Fact: The Common Core is *not* a curriculum. It is a clear set of shared goals and expectations for what knowledge and skills will help our students succeed. Local teachers, principals, superintendents, and others will decide how the standards are to be met. Teachers will continue to devise lesson plans and tailor instruction to the individual needs of the students in their classrooms.

Myth: The federal government will take over ownership of the Common Core State Standards initiative.

Fact: The federal government will *not* govern the Common Core State Standards. The Common Core was and will remain a *state-led* effort. The NGA Center and CCSSO are committed to developing a long-term governance structure with leadership from governors, chief state school officers, and other state policymakers to ensure the quality of the Common Core and that teachers and principals have a strong voice in the future of the standards. States and local school districts will drive implementation of the Common Core.

Myth: The Common Core State Standards will result in a national database of private student information.

Fact: There are no data collection requirements for states adopting the standards. Standards define expectations for what students should know and be able to do by the end of each grade. Implementing the Common Core State Standards does not require data collection. The means of assessing students and the use of the data that result from those assessments are up to the discretion of each state and are separate and unique from the Common Core.

Information retrieved from www.corestandards.org



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Frequently Asked Questions: PARCC

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Division of Public Information, Illinois State Board of Education

1. Q: What is PARCC?

A: The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) is a consortium of states working together to develop a common set of computer-based K–12 assessments in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics linked to the new, more rigorous Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The State Board adopted new Illinois learning standards incorporating the Common Core in 2010.

2. Q: Is PARCC replacing Illinois' current assessments?

A: The PARCC assessments will replace current state assessments for ELA and mathematics in grades 3–11. Full implementation of PARCC will occur during the 2014-15 school year.

3. Q: Why do we need new assessments?

A: The new tests are being developed in response to the longstanding concerns of educators, parents, and employers who want assessments that better measure students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills and their ability to communicate clearly. PARCC is also designed to provide timely results and inform instruction. With this assessment, students – and their teachers – will not have to wait until they are in the next grade to learn their scores and see where they require additional help and attention. Furthermore, PARCC will provide a coherent and aligned grade 3-11 assessment system that reflects Illinois' learning standards and measures what students actually learn in the classroom.

4. Q: When will the PARCC assessments be ready?

A: The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) is working with local schools and PARCC on item review and test development for full implementation of PARCC-developed assessments during the 2014-15 school year. This spring 2014, Illinois will also be field testing the new assessments as part of the development process. The field test is meant to familiarize schools with administration procedures and to provide feedback on item development. Student-level data (scores) will not be generated from the field test.

5. Q: What will PARCC field testing entail?

A: Approximately 680 districts and 1,900 schools in Illinois have agreed to participate in PARCC field testing in March and May 2014. Students participating in the field test will take the Performance-Based Assessment (PBA) or the End-of-Year Assessment (EOY) of the PARCC, or both, in one content area, either ELA or math. The majority of students taking the field test will take only one component, either the PBA or the EOY, in one of the two content areas.

6. Q: What are the benefits of the PARCC assessments?

A: In ELA, many tests do not assess writing and few assess critical-thinking skills. The PARCC will do both. In math, most current assessments are fill-in-the-blank bubble tests. The PARCC will give students a chance to solve real problems in addition to explaining how they solved them. Additionally, the PARCC is aligned to Illinois' new learning standards, so it will accurately reflect student learning and whether or not students are meeting expectations for college and career readiness.

7. Q: What are the components of the PARCC?

A: The PARCC assessment system contains at least three mandatory components and two optional components. The PARCC will test students in the following ways:

- Summative assessments will test students' acquisition of knowledge and development of skills. There will be two such summative components, the PBA and the EOY, which will result in one summative score for students.
- Interim assessments will help teachers identify students' strengths and weaknesses and assist schools in shaping decisions about curriculum and instruction. The mid-year assessment will be available in the 2014-2015 school year.
- PARCC is also developing diagnostic assessments and formative assessments that are optional. These assessments will also be available in the 2014-2015 school year.

- Additionally, speaking and listening assessments are required for ELA but will not be used to determine a summative assessment score.

8. Q: How many PARCC assessments will students take during the school year?

A: The PARCC summative assessments will be administered in a total of nine sessions throughout the school year. At each grade level, the PBA will require five sessions – three sessions for ELA and two sessions for mathematics. The EOY at each grade level will require four sessions – two for ELA and two for math. Currently, the ISAT has three sessions for math and three sessions for reading. When a writing assessment was included in the ISAT there was an additional session. The PSAE has two sessions for reading and two for math, which typically take between five and eight hours to complete. Additionally, when the ACT writing is included in the PSAE, an additional session is needed with a time limit of 30 minutes. In total, the PARCC will require slightly more testing time than the ISAT and PSAE, but testing will be spread out through the school year. The following chart outlines the estimated time it will take for students to complete all sessions of the PBA and the EOY in both ELA and math.

Estimated Testing Times for PARCC

Grade 3	8 hours
Grades 4-5	Just over 9 hours
Middle School	A little less than 9.5 hours
High School	A little more than 9.5 hours

Although it will require more testing time, the PARCC includes new components to capture comprehensive information about college and career readiness.

Furthermore, while the PARCC assesses writing, the ISAT and the PSAE do not, which partially explains the differences in testing time.

9. Q: Will PARCC be administered in grades K-12? If not, what grades?

A. The PARCC summative assessment (PBA and EOY) will be administered in grades 3-8 in both ELA and math. PARCC assessments will be administered in English 9, 10, and 11 and in Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II as an end of course assessment. PARCC formative assessments may be used in grades K-1. The formative assessments include observations, checklists, classroom activities, and protocols which measure foundational aspects of the Illinois Learning Standards. PARCC diagnostic assessments may be administered in grades 2-8.

The diagnostic assessments are meant to indicate student knowledge and skills so that instruction and supports can be tailored to student needs. PARCC speaking and listening assessments will be administered in grades 3-8 and high school courses related to ELA.

PARCC Testing by Grade Level

Grades K-1		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formative assessments
Grades 2-8		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diagnostic assessments
Grades 3-8		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summative assessments (PBA and EOY) in ELA and math • Diagnostic assessments • Speaking and listening assessments in ELA
High School	English	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • End of course PARCC assessments in English 9, 10, 11 • Speaking and listening assessments
	Math	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • End of course PARCC assessments in Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II

10. Q: Have the testing dates been determined?

A: For the 2014 field test, participating schools will administer the PBA between March 24 and April 11 and the EOY between May 5 and June 6. A chart of the specific field testing dates is available at:
<http://www.isbe.state.il.us/assessment/pdfs/parcc/parcc-test-windows14-15.pdf>

11. Q: Will there be any paper and pencil tasks or will it all be administered electronically?

A: The goal is that all Illinois schools will eventually administer the PARCC online as a computer-based assessment. ISBE recognizes, however, that not all schools have the capacity to administer online assessments. At this time, ISBE estimates that more than half of Illinois school districts have the capability to administer the PARCC online. Therefore, those schools without the necessary technology infrastructure will use paper-and-pencil testing during the initial transition to PARCC. The State Board's FY15 budget recommendation includes a \$450 million capital request to assist districts in improving their broadband internet service and network capabilities. After the first year of administration, paper test options will

be available for students that are unable to test by computer due to a medical reason or disability.

12. Q: Is there an alternate assessment for students who are currently taking the IAA?

A: Illinois has joined the Dynamic Learning Maps consortium for the alternate assessment (<http://dynamiclearningmaps.org/>). This assessment will be computer-based and will provide information on student achievement throughout the year.

13. Q: What does PARCC mean for the ACT WorkKeys?

A: The State Board's FY15 budget recommendation includes voluntary administration of the ACT WorkKeys. ISBE is currently working to determine whether or not subcomponents of the PARCC can be used to indicate academic workplace skills. The ACT WorkKeys do not currently align to Illinois' new learning standards. After staff review, ISBE found that the highest level of mathematics assessed by the ACT WorkKeys is at the eighth grade level of Illinois' learning standards. It is necessary to develop indicators of career readiness that align to the state's learning standards, rather than using assessments developed and analyzed by ACT which may not reflect the curriculum and instruction occurring in Illinois.

14. Q: Why isn't Illinois adopting the ACT Aspire assessment system?

A: ISBE believes that PARCC will better serve the needs of Illinois students and educators. ACT Aspire is not fully aligned to the new Illinois learning standards, nor does it contain the innovative technology-enhanced items at the level of PARCC. Furthermore, ACT Aspire does not mirror classroom lessons and activities to the extent that PARCC does.

15. Q: Why isn't Illinois planning on using PARCC assessment for grades 3-10 and the ACT for grade 11?

A: ISBE believes that this system would result in a lack of alignment between grades 10 and 11. The ACT does not closely mirror the new Illinois learning standards and so would not accurately measure the performance of students based on our adopted standards. During the state's transition to PARCC, however, eleventh graders will take the PSAT in spring 2014. The State Board is seeking funding for FY15 to continue to make the ACT available to students as Illinois transitions to the PARCC.



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TALKING POINTS

Why the PARCC is a Meaningful and Useful Assessment System

August 2014, ISBE Division of Public Information

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, 11th-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.

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.
- About a third 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.