



Illinois State Board of Education

100 North First Street • Springfield, Illinois 62777-0001
www.isbe.net

James T. Meeks
Chairman

Tony Smith, Ph.D.
State Superintendent of Education

September 11, 2015

Dear Colleagues:

On Wednesday, September 16, the Illinois State Board of Education will release the initial, and still incomplete, statewide results from the PARCC test. I want you to get as much information as we can share as soon as possible. We will continue to update and publish the data as we receive it. As you are aware, this is the first year you are receiving PARCC results. It is our collective challenge to explain to principals, teachers, parents, and community members what these scores mean for their schools, their classrooms, and their children. I want to offer a few thoughts to help frame these discussions.

First of all, while the numbers are not final, we know that the percent of students who demonstrate proficiency are likely lower than the percentage of students who were proficient on the previous test. Please let everyone in your communities know that we fully expect results to improve as teachers and students become more familiar with the higher standards. These initial results are simply a new baseline from which we can move forward. I do not want anyone to use these results to shame teachers or schools. We need to celebrate the good work our teachers and schools are doing to teach the new content our children must have for success in the future.

Second, please help parents understand that the PARCC test is not an “additional” test but that it replaces an existing test with one that is better aligned to the new standards. As you know, Illinois is deeply committed to minimizing testing and reducing test prep that consumes precious learning time. With aligned assessments, curricula and standards, the best preparation for testing is good teaching and the need for multiple tests and test prep is dramatically reduced or entirely eliminated.

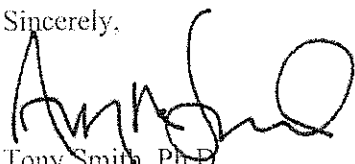
Third, I encourage you to help parents understand that the primary purpose of testing is to help parents and teachers support their children’s learning. Ideally individual student results would be available at the start of the school year so that teachers, parents, and students could use them to inform instruction. This year, we expect individual student results later in the fall. In subsequent years we expect to have them much sooner. Either way, please help parents understand the primary purpose of this assessment is to help their children.

Finally, please let your principals and teachers know that these results are only one of many factors that inform our accountability system. We will never use test scores in isolation to drive school interventions or personnel decisions. We all understand that no test can ever fully capture the inspiring skills and abilities of a great teacher or the extraordinary benefits and positive impact of a great school. Tests are simply one measure to help track our progress. Along with

other indicators, tests help give us a sense of where and how we are succeeding and where and how we must improve.

In the four months I've been in this role, I have had the pleasure of meeting many outstanding educators and students all across Illinois and I can say with absolute confidence that we have the talent, skills, and commitment to meet our highest aspirations. Thanks for all your hard work on behalf of our children. Thanks for doing society's most important work. Thanks, above all, for caring.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tony Smith', written over a horizontal line.

Tony Smith, Ph.D.
State Superintendent of Education