



# Illinois State Board of Education

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## FAQs PARCC

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### 1. Q: What is PARCC?

**A:** The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) is a group of 14 states and the District of Columbia working together to develop a common set of computer-based K–12 assessments for English language arts/Literacy and math linked to the new, more rigorous Illinois Learning Standards (ILS) based on the Common Core.

### 2. Q: Is PARCC replacing the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) and Prairie State Achievement Exam (PSAE)?

**A:** Yes. During the 2014-15 school year, students in third through eighth grade and high school students will take the PARCC in both English language arts (ELA) and math. The PARCC exams will replace the ISAT, formerly given to third- through eighth-graders, and the PSAE, previously given to 11<sup>th</sup>-grade students.

### 3. Q: Why do we need new assessments?

**A:** The new tests were 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 aligned to new learning standards and it can be given online so as to facilitate administration and return of results and to reduce cost of administration. These assessments were developed to help to bridge knowledge of student performance from elementary to high school and between elementary and high school districts. It can be used for instruction unlike past assessments.

Students in Illinois, like their peers across the country and the world, need access to both online learning and assessment as they prepare for college and career.

### 4. Q: What are the benefits of the PARCC assessments?

**A:** In ELA/literacy, many states don't assess writing and few assess critical-thinking skills. PARCC will do both. In math, most previous assessments were fill-

in-the-blank bubble tests. PARCC will give students a chance to solve real problems. Plus, students will have to explain how they solved these problems. The PARCC assessments also 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. Additionally, the multistate test offers a common metric for both educators and policymakers to gauge student performance on a level playing field.

**5. Q: Who developed the PARCC assessments?**

**A:** Educators from K-12 and higher education, including representatives from Illinois higher education institutions, helped to develop the PARCC assessments, which are grounded in evidence to support college and career readiness.

**6. Q: How does the PARCC system work?**

**A:** The PARCC assessment system will test students through the use of summative, interim and formative assessments:

**a) Summative assessments**, which are designed to measure overall curriculum and program effectiveness, will test students' acquisition of knowledge and development of skills. There will be two required summative components: a Performance-Based Assessment (PBA) and an End of Year test (EOY). The administration of the PBA will occur when approximately 75 percent of instruction has been provided. The administration of the EOY test will occur at approximately 90 percent of instruction. Note that the EOY is not measuring growth since the PBA – it is simply the second component. Two parts of the summative test offer students a break from testing. Also, the PBA contains extended tasks that engage the student in the application of knowledge and skills and often contains items that require a human scorer. Because these take longer to generate results, the PBA is offered prior to the EOY, which contains all machine-scored items.

**b) Interim assessments** will help teachers identify students' strengths and weaknesses and assist schools in shaping decisions about curriculum and instruction.

**c) Formative assessments** will provide regular feedback to teachers so they can adjust instruction to improve student learning.

**7. 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 latter part of the school year. For schools with a “blocked schedule,” the testing could begin in December. Schools with a “regular” schedule will begin testing in the spring.

At each grade level, the PBA component will require five sessions – three sessions for ELA/literacy and two sessions for mathematics. The EOY assessment

component at each grade level will require four sessions – two for ELA/literacy and two for math.

In total, the PARCC will require slightly more testing time than the ISAT and PSAE, but testing will be spread out via the two components and generate more meaningful information to guide instruction, parents and students themselves.

The PARCC system includes interim and formative assessments and those are in development and will be available next year (2015-2016).

**8. Q: What grade levels will take the PARCC exams?**

**A:** Third- through eighth-grade students will take the summative grade level assessments (PBA and EOY) in both math and English language arts. The high school summative assessments, called “End of Course” (EOC), will be given at the completion of courses that contain the corresponding standards rather than at the end of a specific grade year. Therefore, students **in any high school grade** may take the PARCC assessments in Algebra II or Integrated Math III and ELA III this year if they are currently taking a course covering those standards.

**9. Q: Have the testing dates been determined?**

**A:** Yes, information on the PARCC testing windows is posted at [www.isbe.net/assessment/pdfs/parcc/parcc-test-windows14-15.pdf](http://www.isbe.net/assessment/pdfs/parcc/parcc-test-windows14-15.pdf).

**10. Q: Will there be any paper and pencil tasks or will the PARCC be administered electronically?**

**A:** ISBE expects more than half of all Illinois schools will administer the PARCC online as a computer-based assessment in spring 2015. However, paper and pencil testing will also be offered in 2014-15, and likely for several years, as an option for schools that are not yet ready to offer an online test.

**11. Q: What are the benefits of taking the test online versus with paper and pencil?**

**A:** There are several. Students need access to online learning opportunities and we hope that those opportunities will increase as we move toward universal online testing but first and foremost, we want to see students gain access to more online learning.

Ultimately, we hope that online testing means faster results so that teachers can target instruction and help students improve in any areas of weakness. Preliminary survey results showed about a third of students said they preferred the online testing format than paper and pencil. The PARCC online test is less costly than the paper and pencil version which will cost about \$10 per copy. An online test, like online classroom learning, helps better prepare students for college and careers.

**12. Q: Is there an alternate assessment for students who are currently taking the Illinois Alternate Assessment (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: How will PARCC affect the administration of the ACT?**

**A:** Districts have the choice to administer the ACT + Writing and/or the WorkKeys. This means that at the district level a decision has to be made regarding giving ACT on the March 3 statewide administration date. All 11th-grade students within a given district will take the ACT + Writing on that date, if the district chooses to test. These tests are fully paid for by ISBE.

If the 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. Dates are available on both the ISBE and ACT websites.

**14. Q: How will PARCC affect the administration of the WorkKeys?**

**A:** 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/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.

**15. Q: What about the EXPLORE and PLAN tests?**

**A:** Those have both been discontinued by ACT. For more information, visit these websites: <http://www.act.org/products/k-12-act-explore/> and <http://www.act.org/products/k-12-act-plan/>.

**16. Q: What additional steps have been taken to prepare schools for implementing PARCC?**

**A:** 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. A “lessons learned” report from the field testing is forthcoming.

**17. Q: What did teachers and students have to say about taking the test?**

**A: Students and test administrators completed a post-test survey about the field test experience with preliminary results showing:**

- About a third of students reported that they would rather take tests on the computer.
- 95 percent of students taking the ELA test and 88 percent of students taking the Math test finished within the allotted time or early.
- Only a third of students reported that the content on the ELA test was more difficult than what they are currently working on in school.

**18. Q: Where can I find more information?**

**A:** Additional information about the PARCC assessments, including resources for parents, students and teachers, can be found at the following websites:

- The PARCC website: <http://www.parcconline.org/>
- ISBE Student Assessments website:  
<http://www.isbe.state.il.us/assessment/parcc.htm>
- PARCC Practice Tests and sample questions:  
<https://www.parcconline.org/practice-tests>

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