

# A BIG WIN FOR ILLINOIS STUDENTS

## Illinois Common Core Standards



In 2014, 86% of Illinois students graduated high school on-time, more than many other states in the nation. Unfortunately, this figure does not tell the full story. Although students received a diploma, many left high school unprepared for success in college or careers. Approximately 46% of the graduating class of 2014 met college readiness benchmarks, and only 66% of the 2014 cohort enrolled in some sort of college or training after high school. In 2012, 37% of freshmen enrolled at Illinois community colleges had to take at least one remedial course because they lacked the skills to complete college-level work. On the Nation's Report Card, also known as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), it is clear that we have set the bar too low for Illinois students. In each grade and subject, just more than one-third of our students are proficient on this more rigorous assessment.

One cause of students' low performance was the state's former low standards. Prior to adopting the Illinois Common Core Standards, the Illinois Learning Standards had not been updated in more than 15 years. They lacked more than half of the critical content in the new standards and were among the worst in the nation. The old Illinois Learning Standards received a 'C' in rigor on the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's 2007 *Leaders and Laggards* report.

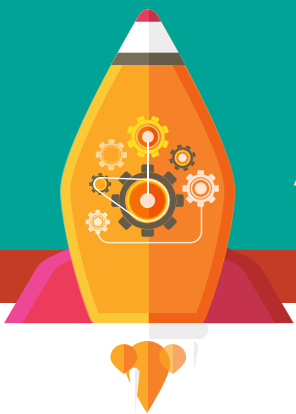
Recognizing the issue, the Illinois State Board of Education adopted an improved set of standards in 2010 to help ensure that every student in Illinois is prepared for college-level work and careers upon graduation. Since 2013, teachers have been teaching the skills outlined in the updated standards.

With the adoption of the updated standards, we are one step closer to ensuring that our youth will have the opportunity to reach their full potential. By 2020, 67% of jobs in Illinois will require a postsecondary credential. However, only 43% of adults in the state currently have this credential, resulting in a 24% skills gap. By raising the bar, we can be confident that our students will be qualified to fill these jobs, contributing to the growth of our economy.

Raising the standards alone is not sufficient to adequately serve the needs of our students, parents, and educators. We need meaningful tests that serve as school-wide academic checkups and early detection systems, providing parents and teachers with the necessary information to better identify struggling students and the interventions that can help them improve.

Illinois's Proficiency Rates on the Nation's Report Card

Year	4th Math	4th Reading	8th Math	8th Reading
2011	38%	33%	33%	36%
2013	39%	34%	36%	36%



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## Higher Standards Deserve Better Assessments

Teachers across Illinois have been hard at work putting these academic goals in place. For more than two years, thousands of teachers across the state have participated in countless hours of training and curricula development to support the standards. Educators have come together to create and share aligned materials and lessons that can be used as models by teachers throughout the state.

The next phase of this work is to implement assessments in Illinois that are more meaningful to students, teachers, and parents. The updated assessments must accurately determine the knowledge and skills a student has mastered and where students need additional support in order to be prepared to succeed at college-level work.

Putting higher standards and better assessments in place is not enough, however. They need to be part of a larger system of accountability that supports student achievement and holds our schools accountable for successfully teaching students the content outlined in the standards. At the heart of accountability is the need to ensure that all students across Illinois are receiving the same high-quality education.

For the past four years, teams of academic and testing experts—and most importantly, teachers—have been working tirelessly to create two updated testing options aligned to these improved standards—Partnership for Assessment of Readiness of College and Careers (PARCC) and Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium. These two assessment systems were field-tested this past spring in 35 states and Washington, D.C. The new tests aim to:

- Accurately measure students' progress toward college and career readiness;
- Assess a wide range of skills, including real-world skills like critical thinking and writing; and
- Provide real-time information on student progress to help guide teacher instruction and improve learning.

Illinois became a governing member of PARCC in 2010. Both the English language arts and math tests will be administered to students in grades 3–8 and in selected high school courses in the spring of the 2014–15 school year. There

has recently been some controversy surrounding the PARCC tests, with some districts attempting to delay or opt out of the assessments due to concerns about the benefits of the tests and excessive testing of students. Illinois must maintain the course to realize the full benefits for students.

During this time of transition, it is important to continue to advocate for a new high-quality and aligned state test. The test will be a great measuring stick of how our students are doing on the path to college at both the state and national levels. Leaders continue to be enthusiastic about the new assessment because it includes so many of the criteria that comprise a high-quality test. As advocates, we need to ensure our new state test not only accurately measures college and career readiness, but also possesses the characteristics that will make it a useful tool to help students improve.

## What Does A High-Quality Assessment Look Like?

A high-quality assessment:

- Is evidence-based and fully aligned to the standards;
- Is developed with input from content specialists, test experts, and teachers;
- Is field-tested and reviewed before being fully implemented;
- Assesses a wide range of real-world skills using a variety of question formats;
- Includes formative (or interim) assessments that serve as “academic checkups” to ensure students are learning the necessary content and critical thinking skills;
- Measures whether students are on track to be ready for college and careers;
- Provides detailed and timely feedback to educators and parents, serving as an early warning signal so proper interventions can be put in place before a student falls significantly behind;
- Is comparable across states so that students who move from one state to another will be held to the same standards and have a smoother transition; and
- Indicates whether students are ready for college-level work.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### 1. What is the difference between curriculum and standards?

- Standards are a set of guidelines for what students are expected to know and be able to do at specific points in their education. Standards provide the foundation for key components of the education system, including curricula, instructional materials, teacher training, and assessments.
- A curriculum is the course of study covering the standards. It is set by local school districts and includes the lesson plans, programs, and textbooks that teachers use to teach the content and skills outlined in the standards.

### 2. If students are learning with different curricula, how can they take the same test?

- Although teachers use different materials and curricula, students still learn the same skills outlined in the standards. Teachers can be creative in their instruction, designing lessons to best reach their students and creating a classroom where all students can achieve.

### 3. What does it mean to have an evidence-based aligned summative test?

- An aligned test means that the assessment measures performance against the evidence-based state standards. Because the PARCC assessments are aligned with the Illinois Common Core Standards, they help ensure that every child is on a path to college and career readiness by measuring what students should know at each grade level.

### 4. Will the new test replace the old state test?

- Yes. The new PARCC assessments will replace the Illinois Standardized Achievement Test (ISAT) in Grades 3–8 and the Prairie State Achievement Examination (PSAE) in high school.

### 5. How quickly will scores come back?

- The interim assessments and pre-tests will provide immediate feedback. There is no definite timeline for the end-of-year assessment results; however, the goal is to have all results available before the end of the school year. PARCC has stated this goal is not likely to be achieved until the second year of testing.



## Why Support the Illinois Common Core Standards?

- They are more relevant to real life than the previous standards.
- They emphasize the skills students will need in the workplace, like critical thinking and writing.
- They are higher, clearer, deeper, and based on what skills students should know and be able to do in order to succeed in college and careers.

## Why Do We Need Good Tests?

- They give us an honest, objective report of how our students are doing.
- They ensure all students are held to the same expectations.
- They identify struggling students so they can get the help they need.

## 6. How will test scores impact teachers?

- All Illinois school districts are required to include student growth as a component in their evaluation systems no later than the 2016–17 school year. Student growth includes state assessment scores, but is only one piece of a teacher’s evaluation.

## 7. How will test scores impact students?

- Test scores are not currently factored into any graduation or promotion requirements. It has not yet been determined if the end-of-course tests will factor into a student’s course grade.

## 8. What kind of professional development did teachers receive in preparation for the standards and the new test?

- Over the past few years, thousands of teachers attended face-to-face and web-based seminars to understand the changes in the new standards. Some also attended “train the trainer” modules and trained fellow teachers at their schools. Teachers also helped develop and create model materials and rubrics to align lesson plans to the standards.

## 9. What kind of data will be collected? Will it be released?

- Under the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Illinois is required to collect data on the performance of schools. The state will collect information on student achievement and progress, but will not release any personally identifiable student information. Federal law protects the privacy of student information and education records through the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). The only information that will be publicly available will contain aggregate data for schools, districts, and subgroups.
- Illinois established a task force to review data privacy and provide recommendations ensuring that student data and information is protected.

## 10. How were teachers involved in the test development process?

- Teachers were involved in the development and review of PARCC test items and reading passages. Teachers were also members of the Education Leader

Cadre, a group of teachers who met in face-to-face meetings and virtual convenings to share best practices, review PARCC state-developed instructional materials, and become active leaders in state and local implementation.

## 11. How long will the tests take?

- The tests are separated into two sections: a performance-based assessment and an end-of-year test. PARCC estimates that the math and language arts assessments will take approximately 9–11 hours, but that time is split into 9 different sessions. As students get older, testing time increases.
- These tests are of much higher quality, so the time invested will provide more detailed and useful information on student progress than ever before. It is time spent reading complex text, writing essays, and explaining their reasoning, which are essential skills to master and to practice.
- On average, students currently spend more time on district-mandated tests than state tests. Since the new tests measure a wider range of skills and provide better information, districts may be able to eliminate many of their required assessments, reducing the overall time students spend testing.

## 12. Do students need to be computer literate?

- Students will need to be computer literate. Paper and pencil versions will be available for schools that lack the capacity to have all students test online.
- While it may take some time to ensure that every school has the hardware necessary and meets the technology requirements, this is a smart investment. Technology is not going away. Ensuring that all students, regardless of geography or household income, have equal access to technology is critical to preparing students for a 21st century competitive workforce.

## 13. Where can I go for more information?

- [www.parcconline.org](http://www.parcconline.org)
- [www.advanceillinois.org](http://www.advanceillinois.org)
- [www.isbe.net/assessment/parcc.htm](http://www.isbe.net/assessment/parcc.htm)
- [www.commoncoreil.org](http://www.commoncoreil.org)
- [www.BusinessForCore.org](http://www.BusinessForCore.org)