



Illinois State Board of Education

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Dear Parent/Guardian:

We received your request to opt out of the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessments. We appreciate your investment in your child's education and want to share with you some information about this new state assessment system.

In 2010, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) adopted new, more rigorous learning standards for English language arts and mathematics. Featuring new types of questions and innovative items, the PARCC assessment is a system designed to assess each student's mastery of these new English language arts and mathematics learning standards.

The PARCC assessment replaces the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) and the Prairie State Achievement Examination (PSAE), and differs from these former assessment systems in a number of ways:

- The PARCC system aligns college and career readiness expectations from kindergarten through grade 12 for the first time in Illinois. (Our previous state tests did not and there was a longstanding disconnect in statewide results, with generally higher scores on the ISAT than the PSAE.)
- The assessments measure whether or not students have the academic knowledge and skills necessary to succeed after high school. The information can be used to address issues early on, reducing the percentage of students who have to take costly and time-consuming remedial classes in college.
- Using technology-enhanced items and various other innovations, students will get a chance to better showcase their skills and results will become available for use more quickly.
- Students must analyze information and explain their answers.
- The PARCC assessment takes advantage of technology to include questions and other tasks that correspond to 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.

More than 110,000 students in 500 districts and 1,200 schools participated in field testing portions of the PARCC assessment in the spring of 2014 to help pave the way for the debut of PARCC as the state assessment in the 2014-15 school year. Third- through eighth-graders will take the PARCC assessment in both English language arts and math. At the high school level, three PARCC tests will be available: Algebra II or Integrated Math III and English Language Arts III.

Schools and districts must administer these assessments. Students may not opt out of the PARCC assessment. Federal law -- specifically, the Elementary Education and Secondary Education Act (also known as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001) -- requires states (including Illinois) receiving Title I funds to provide for the participation in the state's academic assessment of all designated students. See Section 1111(b)(3)(c)

(ix)(l) of that law. A district that allows students to opt out of the state's required test would directly violate both federal and state law.

Moreover, districts face lower public school recognition status and threaten their receipt of state and federal funds if they break the law and do not administer the PARCC assessment. Additionally, teachers and administrators who willingly refuse to comply with federal and state law face local disciplinary action and possible action by the State Educator Preparation and Licensure Board.

The mandate for statewide assessment is just one part of an overall district and school assessment and accountability system. The tests help schools, districts and the state gauge how well students are learning relative to the new standards. We are aware of concerns that additional testing can intrude on instructional time. To address these concerns, we are working with districts and schools to help evaluate local testing programs and, ultimately, reduce the amount of testing for students, where appropriate. PARCC testing time, the aim of which is to provide information to improve the quality of instructional time, represents less than 1 percent of the school year.

Again, the state, local districts and schools are required to administer the PARCC assessment to all students. Districts can develop a policy for those students who refuse to take assessments on testing days, but federal and state law does not provide for any opt-out provisions. Therefore, ISBE does not provide any guidance on how a district or school can provide an "opt-out" because such an option would violate the law.

Finally, there is some misinformation about the role of PARCC and teacher evaluation. In short, which assessments will be used to ascertain student growth are local decisions. There is no requirement that a district use the PARCC assessment for purposes of student growth, although a district, in collaboration with its teachers, may choose to do so.

Under [state law](#), student growth must account for at least 25 percent of a teacher's evaluation for the first two years of evaluations and at least 30 percent of a teacher's evaluation in future years. State law calls for phasing in these new evaluations, with all districts using these new, more comprehensive evaluations by 2016-17. Under this law, called the Performance Evaluation Reform Act (PERA), school districts and teacher groups are required to work together and choose from two of three types of assessments, preferably locally developed assessments, to measure student growth. To learn more, please visit an ISBE webpage devoted to PERA at <http://www.isbe.net/PERA/default.htm> or our Hot Topics page at <http://www.isbe.net/hot-topics.htm>, which covers teacher evaluations as well as PARCC and other statewide education initiatives.