



Illinois State Board of Education

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

Gery J. Chico
Chairman

Christopher A. Koch, Ed.D.
State Superintendent of Education

Frequently Asked Questions: PARCC

February 2014

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 PSAE 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.

###