



Flossmoor School District 161

21st Century Learners Today, Leaders Tomorrow

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February 6, 2015

Dear School District 161 Learning Community Members:

Recently, our students in grades 3-8 have been participating in the PARCC practice sample assessments. The practice tests are designed to help our students become familiar with the testing environment. The District is also providing a parent university on February 11 and 12 at Normandy Villa (District Office). Please see our website for more information. Be mindful that we do not "teach to the test" in District 161, but the format of this new online test is complex. It requires students to manage multiple screens, prompts and tools while typing their answers and being timed. We did not think it was fair to sit students down in front of a computer without giving them some practice.

PARCC is a state mandate. A test of Common Core Standards, PARCC is supposed to measure higher order skills such as critical thinking, effective communication, and problem solving. Students in grades 3-8 are required to be tested in English language skills and math. This year it will replace the Illinois State Achievement Test (ISAT).

However the more we, at District 161, learn about PARCC, the more we are concerned. In addition to the overly complex nature of the test itself, we are concerned about the amount of instructional time that will be lost to testing, the usefulness of the results, and most of all, the impact on students.

Testing Time

PARCC requires every student to take three English language arts tests and two math tests. Each test can take anywhere from 75 to 90 minutes. In total, students will spend about 14 hours taking state mandated standardized tests online this spring. The ISAT took no longer than 7 hours.

Our first PARCC testing "window" occurs from Feb. 25 to March 27. Then we are required to re-evaluate students during a second testing window from April 27 to May 22.

Ensuring that every student has enough computer time to take the test is presenting significant scheduling challenges. Computer labs and media centers at each school will be used for testing and smaller laptop testing centers will be created in other rooms and classrooms of each building. Even utilizing every available device, students will experience two months of disruptions to their regular classroom schedules. In our opinion, this is just too much time to spend on standardized testing and not enough on learning.

Utility of Results

A big drawback of the ISAT was that results of this paper and pencil test came too late for teachers to use in their instruction. The computer-based PARCC was supposed to provide timely data to help guide instruction.

But timely results will not be provided to school districts, at least not in this first year of PARCC. There are too many school districts throughout Illinois without the capacity to

administer the test on computers. These school districts will take the paper version of PARCC, delaying the state's ability to process test results statewide. Like the former ISAT, PARCC data will not arrive before next year.

Test Stress

Students handle testing in their own unique way. Despite our best efforts to make the process as smooth as possible, we anticipate that the length of the tests, their complexity, and the prolonged disruption to the normal school schedule will, at a minimum, make some students uncomfortable.

State Education Mandates

There is a legitimate role for assessments and a recognized need for greater accountability in education. District 161 currently uses an online assessment tool called NWEA/MAP as one of many ways we measure student progress. NWEA/MAP requires just a single response on a single screen and provides information to teachers about their students' strengths and weaknesses in time for teachers to adjust instruction in ways that help students.

However, District 161 does not believe standardized tests are a particularly useful way to evaluate students and schools. Further, we believe time consuming standardized tests, like PARCC, will actually detract from classroom learning.

Nonetheless, District 161 will administer PARCC and comply with the state mandate.

We are far from alone in our concerns. Over the past two years, District 161 and many other districts have repeatedly asked the Illinois State Board of Education to delay PARCC implementation or at least to extend its pilot test period. Those requests have always been denied, reinforced by federal government threats to withhold federal education funding for noncompliance. (For more, see *letter from the State Board of Education*, attached.) In 2010, 26 states committed to using PARCC. Today, only 10 remain in the PARCC consortium.

From low class sizes to offering a host of extracurricular activities to "not teaching to the test," much of what happens in District 161 is driven by our community's high expectations for its schools. PARCC is an important example of how state mandates sometime clash with our local needs and priorities.

If you too have concerns, I encourage you to share them with your local legislators and Governor Rauner.

Sincerely,



Mr. Craig M. Doster, Superintendent



Illinois State Board of Education

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www.isbe.net

James T. Meeks
Chairman

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

January 30, 2015

Dear Superintendent and Board President:

We write in response to the position certain districts have taken or are threatening to take regarding the administration of the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, or PARCC assessment. We send this letter to make it clear that all districts must administer the PARCC assessment to all of their students unless the students are specifically exempt under federal law.¹

Section 6311 (b)(3) of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) requires a State Educational Agency (SEA) that receives funds under Title I, Part A of the ESEA to implement in each Local Educational Agency in the State a set of high-quality, yearly academic assessments that include, at a minimum, assessments in mathematics and reading or language arts. The assessment must be the same for all students and must be administered in grades 3 through 8 and once at the high school level. The U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) confirmed these requirements in a letter sent to us in December, a copy of which is attached.

As you will also see in the letter from the USDOE and as is clear from federal law, as the State Education Agency, we are responsible for the compliance of all districts with these federal requirements. Therefore, we are directing you to administer the PARCC assessment to all students except those who are specifically exempted under law. If any district does not test, ISBE will withhold its Title I funds. We will also seek to recoup the state funds spent on any test booklets unused by the district, as well as any restocking fees charged to ISBE by our testing vendor.

Further, all currently funded Title I School Improvement Grant (SIG) Section 1003(g) schools are required to administer the state accountability assessment pursuant to the terms of these grant awards and the assurances signed by all districts in receipt of these funds. Any district that has a SIG grant and fails to administer the PARCC exam will jeopardize its funding. Because districts must report data to ISBE on performance of students on the assessment, any school without fiscal year 2015 PARCC data would be eliminated from eligibility for all SIG continuation grants or new SIG grant awards.

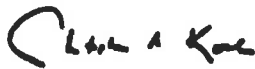
¹ One exception to the general requirement that a State's assessment must be the same for all students is the authority in the Title I regulations for an SEA to adopt alternate academic achievement standards and alternate assessments aligned with those standards for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. See 34 C.F.R. §§ 200.1(d), 200.6(a)(2)(ii)(B). Another exception is students who have been determined to be English Learners and have been in a school in the United States for less than 12 months. See 34 C.F.R. § 200.6(b)(4).

In addition, both Title III of ESEA and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) require that English Language Learners and Students with Disabilities, respectively, be tested unless specifically exempt. In order to receive funds under these statutes, districts must sign assurances that they will comply with all state and federal laws. Therefore, ISBE will withhold Title III and IDEA funds from any district that fails to administer the PARCC exam.

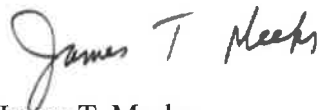
Finally, ISBE is also prepared to take recognition action pursuant to 23 Ill Admin. Code 1.20 against any district that fails to properly administer the PARCC exam to all students. As you are aware, a non-recognized district will lose General State Aid funding.

Please understand that if a district does not administer the assessment, it not only places the district at risk of losing federal funds but it also places the entire State at risk of losing federal funds. According to communications with USDOE, if ISBE fails to sanction a district for failure to test, USDOE will withhold federal funds from the State. In addition, USDOE has made clear that noncompliance with the assessment requirement also places Illinois at risk of losing its No Child Left Behind (NCLB) waiver. ISBE must and will enforce the provisions of ESEA as required by federal law so that ISBE does not place the State at risk of action by the USDOE and because we are committed to implementing valid and reliable performance measures for our schools.

Sincerely,



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



James T. Meeks
Chairman, State Board of Education



UNDERSTANDING THE PARCC FIELD TESTS

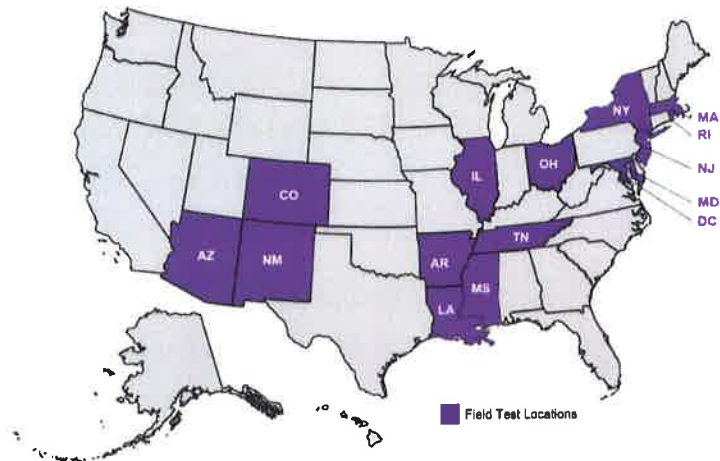
Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) states are developing high-quality, computer-based tests in reading, writing and mathematics, aligned to rigorous standards designed to prepare students for success in college and careers. The tests emphasize fundamental knowledge and skills, and how to apply them to solve real-world problems.

One key milestone in the development of the PARCC assessment system is the administration of field tests. The field tests are a “test of the test questions.” They are designed to determine whether the questions measure what they were designed to measure, and are clear and fair.

Since the early stages of the process, local educators have played a significant role in developing PARCC assessments. Their involvement will continue with the field tests as they and their students are asked to provide feedback.

The Basics

- Fourteen states and the District of Columbia are administering the PARCC field tests this spring.
- More than one million students are expected to take them, or about 10% of the students in the states administering the field tests.
- Individual students will only answer a subset of questions — not take a whole test.
- Some students will take the field tests on computers, others on paper. Similarly, when the actual tests are administered, paper-based tests will be available while schools build their technology infrastructure.



For your calendar: Field testing takes place in two stages starting March 24, 2014*

March 24 – April 11	May 5 – June 6
The performance-based assessment component , which features writing in English Language Arts (ELA) and multi-step, real world problems in math	The end-of-year assessment , which features reading comprehension in ELA and conceptual understanding in math

**A few states may have a slightly different timeline.*

- Most participating students will take one of these components of the PARCC field test, not both.
- A small percentage of students will field test both components in a single subject.
- The field tests will take no more than three hours for most students.

Stay informed! Sign up for updates: www.parcconline.org/news



What to Expect

- There may be a few minor glitches, but that's why we are field testing. We have plans in place to minimize and solve any issues that arise, and working out these glitches will lead to better operational tests.
- PARCC will learn from any issues that arise and apply that knowledge toward the development of the fully operational tests that students will take in spring 2015. The field test is one of many steps in the effort to plan and develop accommodations for students with disabilities and English language learners.
- PARCC will publish a report on lessons learned following the field tests; it will include a list of resources for schools as they prepare for the 2014–15 tests.
- PARCC is testing the tests. PARCC will not generate results for students, schools or districts.

The Benefits

- The field tests will give students and teachers the opportunity to become familiar with PARCC before taking an actual test. (All students will have practice opportunities with the practice test in spring 2014.)
- This is a chance for students and teachers to be part of the test development process by trying out the assessment questions and offering their feedback through educator and student surveys administered at the end of the field tests. Students and teachers in PARCC states are developing their state's tests.
- Through the field test, PARCC will learn more about:
 - Accessibility and fairness of the test items
 - Accommodations for students with disabilities and English language learners
 - Comparability between computer and paper-based tests and comparability between tests administered on different devices, such as tablets and laptops
 - The validity of the test items, or how well they measure student performance on the content the item was designed to measure
 - Whether PARCC assessments can be linked to international tests to compare the academic performance of U.S. students to their global peers

Protecting Privacy

- PARCC and the PARCC states will not generate scores for individual students or classes. PARCC won't have and won't release student scores.
- States control assessment data. PARCC doesn't own and won't release student-level data to the federal government; individual states own their data and set policies around it. In fact, there has been no change to reporting requirements of states or the consortia with regard to collecting and reporting student data.

Getting Ready

- Students can get ready for the field test by checking out publicly released sample items available here: www.parcconline.org/computer-based-samples.
- All students will be able to try out practice tests when they become available this spring. It's a way for students to become familiar with the types of test questions and how the technology platform works before taking the full test in spring 2015.

For more information, please visit: www.parcconline.org/field-test

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