



Illinois State Board of Education

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

James T. Meeks
Chairman

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

March 2015

Dear Parents and Guardians,

As you most likely are aware, third- through eighth-graders and some high school students in Illinois will soon take the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessment. This test represents a significant shift, and the culmination of five years of statewide work, beginning with the adoption of the new Illinois Learning Standards in English language arts and mathematics in 2010. This is not the test we took in school. It's not even similar to the test Illinois students took last year. It is more engaging, interactive and meaningful and will better prepare students for life and careers in the 21st century.

Change, especially large-scale systemic change such as this one, is never easy. We fully expect there will be challenges as schools administer this test in the coming weeks. But that doesn't mean we should change course or lower our expectations. Instead, I ask that you consider learning more about this transition to a test that is more about real life and real learning than any of our previous state tests.

The PARCC assessment system is aligned to our new learning standards and aims to give educators, families and students a more accurate measure of how well Illinois public school children are performing, how they compare to peers across the nation, and whether they're on track to succeed in college. This is important because many students in the United States, including Illinois, are arriving at college -- after doing everything required to graduate from high school -- without the knowledge and skills to succeed in a credit-bearing college course or an understanding of how what they learned in school is applicable to a career. Anywhere from 20 percent to half of all students in postsecondary institutions must take one or more costly remedial courses their freshman year. This is a waste of both money and time and immediately puts these students at risk of not finishing college. The PARCC assessment will more closely track student learning so that any necessary remediation can take place as students progress through elementary and high school.

The PARCC assessment is designed to reflect classroom experiences. About 111,000 Illinois students and 1 million students nationwide participated in the PARCC field-testing last spring. Some said the PARCC assessment did not even seem like a test, but more like instruction. This is not a test that is passed with rote memorization and last-minute drills. It calls for critical thinking, problem-solving and the ability to synthesize information from various sources and provide evidence and reasoning when making an argument or solving a math equation. It measures writing skills at each grade level. Rather than just asking students to select the correct answer and fill in the bubble of a multiple-choice test, it pushes students to apply their

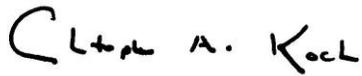
knowledge, thus better preparing them for higher education and a career. All students deserve the opportunity to demonstrate what they know and see how knowledge is applied to real-life situations.

We hope that you will take time to talk to your local school principal and administrators to learn more about the PARCC assessment. We have posted a number of parent resources on the ISBE website, including materials on how to host a parent event about the assessment. You can find links to these materials at <http://www.isbe.net/assessment/htmls/parcc-primer.htm#primer>. Additionally, PARCC has resources for parents at <http://www.parcconline.org/for-parents>.

Importantly, we encourage you to talk with your children and share that while this is an important test, it only yields one piece of information about them and their school's progress. Students' school attendance, the school climate and culture, classroom work, homework, projects, local tests as well as sports and extracurricular activities all contribute to helping children grow and learn.

Thank you for your role in developing lifelong learners and successful citizens.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christopher A. Koch". The letters are cursive and somewhat stylized, with the first name "Christopher" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Koch".

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