

Standards, Assessments & Accountability

Spring 2015

With the new Illinois Learning Standards and a new system of state assessments in place¹, Illinois is creating an accountability system that values academic achievement and improvement as the cornerstones of school performance.

This moves beyond the strict test-based accountability that labeled most Illinois public schools as failing to a more holistic system that draws upon multiple measures of school performance – including student progress and proficiency – and focuses on the lowest-performing schools most in need of support².

This is a significant step forward for Illinois public education. The new standards and assessments support deeper instruction while the new accountability system supports continuous improvement³. Illinois is putting in place a system that values data to improve schools, not saddle them with sanctions.

New Assessments Truly Support Instruction

Illinois debuted a new assessment system called PARCC, the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers. This replaces old state standardized tests.

PARCC reflects the new Illinois Learning Standards, and makes clear what students must know and be able to do at every grade level in their progression toward college and career readiness⁴. It provides more detail on how well a student meets specific standards. So, too, does it provide teachers with more detail to inform and support instruction. PARCC will be one of the multiple measures that factor into the new accountability system. With new diagnostic and formative assessments coming soon, PARCC focuses the state assessment system on instruction, not accountability.

New Accountability Focuses On Improvement and Schools Most In Need

Illinois received a waiver from the federal No Child Left Behind law⁵. As a condition of the waiver, Illinois agreed to develop a new accountability system based on school progress.

The new accountability system recognizes that schools vary in their performance level, but expects all schools to make progress. Two driving goals underlie the new system:

1. Support more students to achieve standards for college and career readiness, reducing by half the percentage of students who are not meeting them within six years:
2. Close by half the state's achievement gaps within six years⁶.

In addition, the accountability system shelve the sweeping description of failing schools for one in which the state targets the lowest performing five percent of schools (Priority Schools) for intensive improvement efforts and another 15 percent for more focused improvement (Focus Schools)⁷.

In November 2013, 147 schools⁸ – less than four percent of the nearly 4,000 public schools statewide – were identified as priority schools. These report a three-year average on state assessments that rank in the lowest five percent statewide or whose three-year graduation rate is less than 60 percent. This compares with more than 2,500 schools⁹ that failed to meet annual performance targets under the all-or-nothing accountability system of No Child Left Behind.

A New Era of Accountability for Illinois Students, Educators and Schools

The new state standards and assessments aim to support teaching and learning, recognizing that all students must be held to high standards and supported to achieve them¹⁰. The new accountability system shifts from a system of penalties to one of support for students and schools most in need.

Learn more about Illinois' shift to new standards and assessments at www.advanceillinois.org/assessments

- 1 Illinois PTA, "Parents' Guide to New Assessments in Illinois," 2013.
- 2 Illinois State Board of Education, "ESEA Flexibility: Illinois Request," 2014.
- 3 Illinois State Board of Education, "Flexibility Under the NCLB Waiver: Fact Sheet," 2014.
- 4 Illinois State Board of Education, "A New Vision of Assessment: Texts Worth Reading, Problems Worth Solving, Tests Worth Taking," 2014.
- 5 U.S. Department of Education, "Letter to the Honorable Christopher A. Koch," April 18, 2014.
- 6 Illinois State Board of Education, "ESEA Flexibility: Illinois Request," 2014.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Illinois State Board of Education, "FAQs: NCLB Flexibility Waiver," 2014.
- 9 Illinois State Board of Education, "More Illinois Schools Identified for Improvement Under No Child Left Behind Targets," 2012.
- 10 Advance Illinois, "Making Assessments Work: A New Starting Point for Illinois Public Education," 2013.