



Illinois State Board of Education

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Fact Sheet: New ISAT Performance Level Cut Scores

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Division of Public Information, Illinois State Board of Education

Our students deserve a well-rounded, world-class education that is relevant to the demands of an increasingly competitive global marketplace. Under new learning standards the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) approved in 2010, Illinois schools are in the process of realigning not only what they are teaching students but *how* they teach core content. It's an exciting time in education as school teams and statewide organizations work together to ensure that each student leaves high school equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to pursue higher education or enter the work force.

Schools are now implementing curricula and instructional approaches that meet the Common Core State Standards, essentially guidelines outlining the content and abilities students must master and demonstrate at each grade level to continue on the path to college and career readiness. The Common Core standards are higher, fewer and deeper and ensure that students not only acquire knowledge but can apply it in real-world terms.

State tests must now align with these more rigorous standards. In January 2013, ISBE raised the performance level cut scores of the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) for math and English language arts. The ISAT, given to third through eighth grade students each spring, is part of the state and federal accountability system. The higher cut scores will give administrators, teachers and parents a better picture of students' progress toward college and career readiness. The State Board, working with an expert advisory committee, looked at the necessary college and career readiness scores of 11th-graders and then set scores for each elementary grade level accordingly. In short, it worked back from the high school readiness scores and set grade-level appropriate scores to ensure that elementary students will be on track for college and career readiness. This means that students will be measured against college and career readiness benchmarks earlier – starting in third grade – to ensure they're on track to succeed in high school and beyond rather than waiting for the 11th grade Prairie State Achievement Exam (PSAE) to yield this information.

As anticipated, the higher performance level cut scores for the ISAT resulted in a sharp drop in the number of students whose 2013 ISAT scores met or exceeded standards. Districts now have those scores and will release them to families and their communities this fall while ISBE will release all scores by Oct. 31, per the timeline provided in state statute.

An earlier ISBE analysis of the new levels against past scores prepared districts for the decline in scores. According to the 2012 ISAT results, 79 percent of all third through eighth grade students scored proficient in reading and 86 percent of students scored proficient in mathematics. When using the new cut scores to

analyze the ISAT data collected in spring 2012, the percentage of students who would have met or exceeded standards dropped to 60 percent for both reading and mathematics.

This change in performance levels does not mean that our students know less or are less capable than they were in previous years. It also is not a reflection on teacher performance. Instead, ISBE is raising the bar on what students must achieve in order to be ready for success in college and career.

Prior to raising the cut scores, the ISAT did not align to the new standards of the Common Core. As a result, a disconnect emerged between students' ISAT scores and their performance on the PSAE, which is given to all 11th graders. Last year, 82 percent of students met or exceeded standards on the ISAT statewide, while only 51 percent met or exceeded standards on the PSAE. The PSAE includes the ACT, which is the gold standard for college and career readiness. The higher cut scores now align the ISAT with the greater expectations of the PSAE and provide a more accurate indication of whether a student is on track for post-secondary success.

Local districts will receive college- and career-ready guidance to provide the appropriate supports and interventions for struggling students at an earlier point in their academic career. The higher performance expectations also paved the way for a new assessment to replace the ISAT during the 2014-15 school year.

The new assessment system will be administered online at least twice a year and will be completely aligned to the Common Core State Standards. Teachers, parents and students will receive better and more timely information regarding students' strengths and areas that need improvement.

ISBE is also considering a final version of new science standards, called the Next Generation Science Standards, which are internationally benchmarked and will change how science and engineering are taught. Similar to the changes with the Common Core standards, these standards will require changes to curricula and instructional practices and will ultimately also be aligned with a new assessment. In the interim, the performance expectations for the science portion of the ISAT will remain the same.

The raised performance expectations are among several initiatives under way in Illinois and throughout the United States. Our state is among more than 40 that have formally adopted the Common Core State Standards for college and career readiness and have also changed their performance expectations in recent years, including New York, Michigan, Tennessee, Massachusetts and Kansas.

This fall, ISBE will also introduce a new, simplified and more consumer-friendly report card that will provide a more robust picture of individual schools, with details on school extracurricular activities, awards and recognitions, special programs and advanced courses and community partnerships. Included in the report card will be summary information from the 5Essentials, the first statewide educator and student survey about each school's learning conditions and climate.

Resources

Illinois State Board of Education:

<http://www.isbe.net/assessment/htmls/isat-cut-scores13.htm>

Common Core IL:

<http://commoncoreil.org/real-learning/>

Common Core State Standards Initiative:

<http://www.corestandards.org/>

Additional fact sheets provided by the ISBE Division of Public Information will be released throughout 2013.

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