PARCC PARENT FAQ

What is the Common Core?
The Common Core State Standards are a set of updated goals for what students should know and be able to do by each grade in math and English Language Arts to ensure that they graduate from high school prepared to be successful in college, careers, and life. Illinois, 45 other states and the District of Columbia adopted the Common Core in 2010. Since then, teachers and principals in CPS schools across the city have been hard at work implementing these higher, clearer, and deeper standards so students in classrooms today learn the content and strategies that will equip them to meet the real-world challenges they’ll encounter after graduation.

What is the PARCC assessment and who will take it?
PARCC, which stands for Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, is a new computer-based assessment aligned to the Common Core. It will measure student learning in math and English Language Arts and it replaces the old state test (ISAT). Elementary school students in grades 3-8 and high school students in English I and Algebra I/Integrated Math I will take PARCC starting this year. Students in grades 3-5 will take a paper and pencil version of the test; all older students will take PARCC on a desktop, laptop, or tablet computer.

Why are we moving to a new assessment system?
➢ PARCC will be a better test.
PARCC is aligned with the Common Core and designed to comprehensively measure what students are learning in the classroom every day. Rather than simply filling in bubbles, students will demonstrate their knowledge and skills by tackling realistic, complex questions and explaining how they reached their answers.

In this way, PARCC will address many of the shortcomings of standardized testing in the past. Because it aligns with students’ everyday learning, it means less time will be spent “teaching to the test” and in the long run, less testing time overall, as better information on how students are doing will reduce both the number of tests and the time students spend testing. In 2013, CPS took another important step toward significantly cutting assessment time by reducing the number of tests that students in the District are required to take.

➢ PARCC will provide actionable feedback faster.
PARCC will provide principals, teachers and students with a more accurate picture of how well students are doing and do so much more quickly. This means that we will be able to identify earlier when students are excelling or, if they are falling behind, PARCC will help us pinpoint exactly the areas in which they need help. Principals will be able to use this information to shape teachers’ professional development, teachers will use it to tailor their teaching, and students will know where to concentrate their efforts.
➢ **PARCC will be a better measure of college, career, and life readiness.**

   Without a doubt, PARCC is a more rigorous test than the ISAT, raising expectations significantly for what students should know and be able to do. This will be a challenging transition, but a much-needed one.

   When the bar is set too low, we miss the opportunity to identify which students need help when the gap between them is still small and we can most easily close it. What this has meant in the past is that many students told that they “met standards” were actually underprepared for the challenges of high school, college and the workplace and this cost them dearly - in both time and money. More realistic expectations will help students get the support they need so they can avoid remedial coursework and be confident demonstrating the skills that employers seek.

**If PARCC is a better test, why did CPS initially ask to delay implementing it this year?**

Standardized assessments are an important tool that we use to measure how much students have learned each year. These student “growth metrics” are one of the multiple measures we use to evaluate teachers, principals and schools.

Although PARCC promises to be a very effective assessment, before we made it part of our accountability system, we wanted to make sure that it delivered valid and reliable results for all our students. For this reason, we requested that the Illinois State Board of Education allow us to expand our pilot of PARCC, so that we could address these and any other logistical issues that might arise to ensure a smooth transition to full implementation the following school year. The State Board recently denied this request and threatened to withhold $1.4 billion dollars. These dollars are critical to support our students’ learning, so CPS must fully implement PARCC in March of 2015.

While CPS might not have chosen to transition to PARCC quite so quickly, we do believe we will gain vital information from this assessment about what our students have learned, areas in which they are excelling, and areas in which they need additional support.

This year, PARCC results will not be used for teacher evaluations or school ratings (SQRP). To ensure stability as we transition to PARCC, we will continue to rely on NWEA MAP and EPAS (ACT) this school year to measure how well students are learning.

**Where can I learn more about the PARCC assessment?**

To learn more about PARCC, please visit www.cps.edu/PARCC.