



Illinois State Board of Education

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James T. Meeks
Chairman

Tony Smith, Ph.D.
State Superintendent of Education

September 4, 2015

Dear parents and guardians,

I am excited to welcome your students back to the classroom and begin my first full school year as Illinois' state superintendent. I look forward to getting to know your local school districts in the months ahead and to hear your input on what makes our public schools innovative and engaging places to work

Learning begins at home and families are central to nurturing students' healthy development and education. As parents, you influence your child's success in the classroom in many ways, from making sure a student arrives at school well fed and on time to helping with homework and attending school meetings. Therefore, it's crucial that families stay up to date on the current initiatives that are strengthening public education and preparing your students for success after high school graduation and beyond.

I invite you to join me and the Illinois PTA for a Back-to-School Webinar at **7 p.m. Sept. 23**. The webinar is an opportunity for me to tell you more about my areas of focus as well as go over some of the work before us this school year and to take your questions. More information about how to register is at the end of this letter.

There is much to discuss as the school year gets underway. Later this fall, the results of the first Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) administration will be released. The first year of PARCC testing went better than expected, with 75 percent of the state's students taking the exam online and no statewide technical issues reported. Results are taking longer to produce for this initial year. The 2014-15 PARCC testing results are a baseline for test scores and will establish the performance targets for future years. However, there are no immediate consequences for schools or students. Illinois educators and their colleagues from other states are reviewing students' work to determine the performance levels for the PARCC exam. As a result, scores will not be available to families until later this year. The State Board is working on preparing guides to help you understand the PARCC assessment results and what they mean for your student(s).

We have also listened to your feedback about the PARCC exam and are using it to improve the testing process. As a result, changes are planned for spring 2016 to help simplify the logistics, decrease testing time for students, and reduce the overall number of testing units. There will be only one 30-day testing window next year, and the exam will now consist of six or seven test units, depending on grade level, compared to the eight or nine sessions that students took earlier this year. The PARCC Governing Board, which is made up of representatives from PARCC member states and makes policy and operational decisions for the PARCC Consortium, has also decided to reduce math testing time by 60 minutes and remove a half hour from the English language arts portion for most students. Your thoughts and concerns will continue to be heard throughout this process, and we will continue working on the PARCC content and process based upon that input.

In other assessment news, ISBE is seeking bids on a college entrance assessment. The new test would be administered in spring 2016, and a decision is expected later this year. We are also developing a new science assessment aligned to the Illinois Learning Standards in science to be given to students during the upcoming school year. The standards were adopted by the State Board in January 2014 and are based on the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). The new science standards will provide students a more engaged and hands-on science education that instills a deeper understanding of the core concepts of science and the ability to apply these concepts to real-world situations. ISBE is also in the process of reviewing the state's arts and social studies education standards to build on our work to update all learning standards to better prepare students for success after graduation.

Our agency is also continuing its work to strengthen the relationship between parents and schools through our Family Engagement Framework Guide. This guide recommends research-based principles to encourage more continuous and meaningful family participation. We realize that our efforts can only go so far without the understanding, support, and cooperation of parents. I hope you will take the opportunity to join me on Sept. 23 to learn more about key statewide issues and become an active partner in your child's education.

To reserve your seat for the Back-to-School webinar, visit <https://attendeegotowebinar.com/register/5338416294297449473>.

We suggest listeners log in a few minutes early to establish connections, especially if this is your first time attending a live "Go to Webinar" from your computer or mobile device. We will begin transmitting a title screen at least 15 to 20 minutes prior to the scheduled 7 p.m. start so that participants can determine that they are properly connected.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to connecting with you.

Sincerely,



Tony Smith, Ph.D.
State Superintendent of Education