



**Urbana School
District 116**

Jean F. Burkholder
Administrative Service Center
www.usd116.org

Donald D. Owen, Ed.D
Superintendent of Schools
217-384-3600
Fax 217-337-4973

205 North Race Street
P.O. Box 3039
Urbana • Illinois • 61803-3039

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Dear Parents and Families:

I am writing to inform you of changes that the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) has made to the Illinois Standard Achievement Test (ISAT) and what it means for your child and our schools.

In 2010, ISBE adopted new learning standards in Mathematics and English/Language Arts. These new standards are often referred to as Common Core State Standards. These new standards are higher, clearer, and deeper. As part of the school district's Strategic Plan, we have aligned our district curriculum to the new standards, and we have worked with our teachers to identify curricular and instructional changes based on the new standards. These higher and clearer standards require changes in what we teach and how we teach it. Your students will also be required to learn in different ways. You can learn more about the Common Core State Standards and the district curriculum by visiting the district website: www.usd116.org.

The new expectations also pave the way for the state to replace the ISAT tests in Math and English/Language Arts with the *Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers* (PARCC) exams. The PARCC exams will line up with the Common Core State Standards and provide better information about students' abilities to master the appropriate skills and content for college and careers. Unlike the ISAT, which is given once a year, the PARCC tests will be given more than once during the school year. We believe the exam will give us a more detailed picture of students' strengths and areas that need improvement. The new PARCC tests are scheduled to begin in the 2014-2015 school year.

Until the new assessments are developed and implemented, ISBE has decided to raise the expectation of what it means to meet and exceed standards on the ISAT for students in Grades 3-8. ISBE is hoping that the new higher cut scores will result in better alignment with the ACT and Prairie State Achievement Exam (PSAE), which is given to students in Grade 11.

What impact will the new ISAT cut scores have? By aligning the 2012 test scores to the new expectations, the percentage of all Illinois students who met the standard would have dropped by 26 percentage points in math and 19 percentage points in reading. In Urbana, when we apply the new cut scores to the 2013 test scores, the percentage of students who met the standards would have dropped 26 percentage points in math and 17 percentage points in reading. Again, that does not reflect a drop in scores, just raising the bar of what is expected.

These higher expectations will cause the number of students who meet and exceed standards to drop significantly. Some students who previously met or exceeded standards may not meet standards on the ISAT with the new higher cut scores. However, these new expectations do not mean that our students know less than they did before or are less capable than they were in previous years. Instead, ISBE has changed the cut scores and is in the process of changing the statewide assessments.

Please remember that one of the drawbacks of the ISAT is that it is a single multiple-choice test that is given once per year, and is not able to show student growth or provide meaningful instructional feedback to teachers. All of the teachers in Urbana School District #116 have been working on improving assessment and instructional methods that meet the new expectations in the Common Core State Standards. We use a variety of measures to determine if students are making appropriate progress and we do not define our students, our teachers, or our schools based on the results of a single test.

While the ISAT is just one piece of the educational picture of student achievement, we will continue to use the ISAT results along with other standardized and formative assessments to improve our practice and our outcomes for students. What we will not do is change our instructional methods just to teach to a test. The focus of our improvement efforts will always be on preparing our students for their future.

We strive to provide the best educational opportunities for all students in our community. We appreciate your continued support and engagement with your child's learning. Please do not hesitate to talk to your child's teacher or building principal if you have any questions or concerns. You, as parents and family members, are our most valuable partners in your child's education.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Donald Owen". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "D" and a distinct "Owen" at the end.

Donald Owen
Superintendent