

## River Bend Schools Prepare to Take the New Illinois PARCC tests

Many of you have heard the phrases Common Core and PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers) while communicating with your child's teacher. The Common Core Standards have been utilized for the past two-three years. The Common Core Standards are a national curriculum movement to develop a more rigorous set of standards and promote higher levels of learning. The Illinois State Board of Education adopted the Common Core Standards and has renamed them The New Illinois Learning Standards. The PARCC exams will be replacing the ISAT exams. The new PARCC exams are designed to measure how well students understand the new Illinois Learning Standards and provide feedback about college/career readiness. The following link will take you directly to a PARCC for parents information page. <http://www.parcconline.org/for-parents>

The new PARCC exams will be taken on-line and will require students to complete utilizing computers. The computer labs and laptop carts will be used during the two phases of the tests. Phase one will take place March 9<sup>th</sup> through April 3<sup>rd</sup>. Phase two will take place April 27<sup>th</sup> through May 22<sup>nd</sup>. Each building principal has created a schedule for students in grades three through eight and grade 10. The schedules have been shared with staff, students and parents. I encourage those with children in school to assure attendance on the testing days. Make-up exams are required by the state of Illinois. This is a dramatic change in the way districts have been asked to assess student progress. We anticipate a great deal of patience will be necessary during the testing cycles.

The following information, taken from the PARCC website, gives some insight to the test changes. The PARCC test is broken into two sections, given at two different times, in order to measure different kinds of knowledge and skills. The early spring performance-based component includes longer questions that usually require multiple steps. It measures critical thinking, reasoning and the ability to apply skills and knowledge in reading, writing and mathematics. Students read passages from real texts - fiction and non-fiction, and sometimes watch video or listen to audio. They write, using what they've learned from the passages and multi-media to support their arguments. These skills are critically important for students in college and in the workplace. In the past, students have typically been asked to write only once in each grade span - in elementary, middle, and high school. PARCC measures writing at every grade because it is key to showing readiness for the next academic work, and in high school, readiness for college and career. Students also solve multi-step math problems that require reasoning and address real-world situations. This requires students to reason mathematically, make sense of quantities and their relationships to solve real-world problems, and show their understanding. Many previous assessments focused mostly on rote procedure only. Students participate in the end-of-year component shortly before the end of the school year. This consists of innovative, short-answer questions and items to measure concepts and skills. Students demonstrate their understanding of literary and informational reading passages and give definitions of words based on their reading of texts, rather than on memorization. They also show understanding of mathematics concepts, procedures and short applications.

It is anticipated that the new standards and new testing procedures will not provide schools with the best information. Assessments are designed to measure how well students understand standards. The new Illinois Learning Standards have been in place for two years. How students respond to the new tests, taking the test electronically and understand the new standards after two years of usage is an unknown. Many testing experts anticipate student scores decreasing because of the many changes.

The River Bend staff has been working very hard preparing students for the upcoming exams. Teachers have been teaching the new standards for the past two years. Teachers are also providing practice opportunities to take the new tests on-line. The standards and measurement of those standards will be a new practice for all of us. We will continue to prepare our students for success on these new tests and keep you informed as we learn more about the results.