The spring 2016 ISTEP+ assessment will represent Indiana’s second year of implementation of testing for the new Indiana Academic Standards for grades 3-8. However, 2016 is the first year that the ISTEP+ will be used in grade 10.

The Assessments

Teachers and principals talk a lot about assessments, which are used to measure students’ academic achievement. This document highlights the end-of-year summative assessments, which judge (1) student progress toward mastering state standards and (2) program and school effectiveness. For other assessments used, see box at right.

Summative assessments address longstanding concerns that parents, educators and employers have had about current state assessments—namely that they measure ability to memorize facts, rather than the skills to think critically and apply knowledge.

Types of assessments

- **Classroom-based**: Individual tests given by teachers as needed throughout the year to assess knowledge and skills in specific areas
- **Interim**: The same test repeated at set intervals to measure student growth over time
- **Summative**: End-of-year assessments administered by the state to measure student performance against a common set of standards

This document addresses summative assessments.

THIS GUIDE INCLUDES:

- Overview of new assessments which measure student proficiency against more challenging standards
- Overview of accountability for students, teachers and schools
- Additional resources for parents
The assessments for English and mathematics enable educators to deepen their understanding of student progress from grade to grade—and just as importantly, identify any gaps in progress so they can address them well before students enter college or the workforce.

**ELA assessments demonstrate:**
- Whether students can read and comprehend texts of varying complexities.
- How well students can integrate information across sources to make a persuasive argument.
- The degree to which students can use context to determine the meaning of academic vocabulary.

**Math assessments demonstrate:**
- Whether students understand and can use important math ideas, including number sense, algebraic thinking, geometry and data analysis.
- The extent to which students can use math facts and reasoning skills to solve real-world problems.
- How well students can make math arguments.
Benefits of New Assessments:

- The assessments allow students to show their work and explain their reasoning so teachers can better understand what they know and where there are gaps in learning that need to be addressed.
- Rather than focusing on what a child has memorized through multiple choice questions, the new tests ask students to apply skills like thinking, reasoning and justifying answers—showing what they know and can do.
- The tests do not lend themselves to “teaching to the test.” Since they focus on applying skills, it is the daily practice of these skills in the classroom that will serve as the best preparation for the tests.
- Beginning with the spring 2017 ISTEP+ assessment, schools will be expected to administer both the Part I (open-ended) and Part II (multiple choice) portions of the ISTEP+ online.
- The new assessments will be designed to provide accurate measures of achievement and growth for all students, including those with disabilities and English language learners.

College and career readiness defined:

The level of preparation a student needs to enroll and succeed—without remediation—in a credit-bearing course at a postsecondary institution that offers a baccalaureate degree or in a high-quality certificate program that enables students to enter a career pathway with potential future advancement.
Sample Questions by Grade Level

The following questions are representative of those found on the new assessments.

Please visit the Indiana Department of Education’s assessment website to view “Item Samples” for every grade level:
Grades 3-8: doe.in.gov/assessment/istep-grades-3-8
Grade 10: doe.in.gov/assessment/istep-grade-10

EXAMPLE OF A 4TH GRADE MATH QUESTION

SAMPLE ITEM

Morgan is buying carpet for the two rooms shown in the diagram.

Part A
What is the floor area, in square feet, of Room A?
Show All Work

EXAMPLE OF AN 8TH GRADE MATH QUESTION

SAMPLE ITEM

Part A
Solve the equation $\frac{2}{3}(x + 12) + \frac{2}{3}x = 4$.
Show All Work
Answer:

Part B
Explain how you know when a linear equation in one variable has infinitely many solutions.

Part C
What does it mean when a linear equation in one variable has infinitely many solutions?
EXAMPLE OF A 10TH GRADE ELA QUESTION

SAMPLE ITEM

Students are asked to read “Explosion of the Space Shuttle Challenger Address to the Nation” delivered by President Ronald W. Reagan on January 28, 1986. Students have to answer the following questions based on the reading:

- How does Reagan relate the idea of mourning the tragedy with the idea of encouraging the future of space exploration? Support your answer with details from the speech.

- How does the coincidence described in Paragraph 10 contribute to Reagan’s purpose of the speech? Support your answer with details from the speech.

Practice Assessment Items

To help students do as well as possible on the ISTEP+ assessments, the Indiana Department of Education (IDOE), through its contractor, Pearson, provides Electronic Practice Assessment Tests (ePATs). ePATs make it possible for students, educators, parents and community members to experience various technology-enhanced question types that will appear on the ISTEP+ assessment from home, at school or on mobile devices. These practice opportunities enable students to become comfortable with the technology used for online testing before they take ISTEP+, allowing them to better demonstrate the knowledge and skills they have gained in the classroom. To learn more, visit: 
doe.in.gov/assessment/experience-online
The spring 2015 ISTEP+ test was the first state assessment to be based on Indiana’s new, more rigorous college- and career-ready standards. For that reason, the 2015 ISTEP+ scores are not comparable to previous pass rates. Instead, the 2015 results established a new baseline for student progress towards college- and career-ready benchmarks. As such, the spring 2016 ISTEP+ results will also not be comparable to pass rates prior to spring 2015.

As students and teachers gain the skills and knowledge needed to meet the new higher standards, performance will also improve. In other states where more rigorous tests have been implemented, students improved their performance after the first year.

If parents have questions regarding ISTEP+ results, they should contact their child’s school for assistance.

How should parents interpret score reports?

The ISTEP+ score report has a test score scale that is divided into three performance levels using two cut scores. The two cut scores are the two minimum scores that separate the three performance levels. Based on their ISTEP+ test scale score, students are placed into one of three performance levels: Pass+, Pass or Did Not Pass. For Indiana students, the performance level labeled “Pass” is the proficient level.

A student who scores in the Pass or Pass+ performance levels meets or exceeds the cut scores. A student who scores in the Did Not Pass performance level may require additional assistance in order to be successful in their current grade.

Each performance level has a descriptor, which explains what students can demonstrate that they know in terms of the content and skills measured by the ISTEP+ assessment. By examining the performance level descriptor for the level in which a student has been placed, teachers, parents/guardians and the student can gain an understanding of the student’s current knowledge of a particular content area.

For more details, please feel free to review the spring 2015 Guide to Test Interpretation for Grades 2-3 which can be found on the ISTEP+ website: doe.in.gov/assessment/istep-grades-3-8. The 2016 Guide to Test Interpretation will be available in late summer or fall 2016.
What is the format for the Student Report?

The front of the Student Report shows each student’s overall score in each content area as well as the student’s performance level (Pass+, Pass or Did Not Pass) on the English language arts and mathematics parts of the test. For grades that test in science and social studies, the report also contains scores for those content areas.

The back of the Student Report provides details on performance by content area and on open-ended items. Open-ended question types require students to write the answer to a question instead of simply choosing an answer.

The Indiana Department of Education’s ISTEP+ website provides a link to online tools parents can use to access their student’s individual ISTEP+ test results. The online parent portal also provides resources for parents to use in working with your child at home.

- For information for students in grades 3-8, visit: doe.in.gov/assessment/istep-grades-3-8
- For information for students in grade 10, visit: doe.in.gov/assessment/istep-grade-10

How will schools support students during the transition?

Schools have created a variety of models to assist students who are struggling with the standards. Remediation and summer courses, in-class adjustments based on ongoing in-class assessment results and pull-out tutoring are just a few support strategies. Parents should collaborate with teachers and administrators to develop a plan as needed.

TAKE ACTION: Parents can work with school or district curriculum directors to learn about the new curriculum and understand how to support their children to minimize any dips in assessment scores.
How are schools, students and teachers held accountable?

Indiana recently adopted a new student-centered accountability system. This new system was put into place for the 2015-16 school year.

Indiana’s Student-Centered Accountability System evaluates schools based on both student growth and their performance toward college-and-career ready benchmarks. While the percentage of students who pass tests is still important, schools are also rewarded if they can help:

- Struggling students get closer to proficiency
- Proficient students stay proficient or perform at higher levels
- High-performing students remain high performing
- Students remain in school and ultimately graduate, even if it takes five years
- Students demonstrate college-and-career readiness through advanced placement (AP) and international baccalaureate (IB) exams, dual credit completion or industry certification

The new plan also articulates teacher accountability measures, ensuring that teacher effectiveness ratings are measured against student growth and performance throughout the year.

Most importantly, the Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) recognizes that flexibility is necessary when evaluating teachers and schools during transition periods, such as when new assessments are being used. For that reason, schools and educators were not penalized and instead were “held harmless” for the results of the 2015 ISTEP+ test.

The IDOE has created a new accountability Web page with more information for all stakeholders, including parents: doe.in.gov/accountability/indiana-student-centered-accountability
Parents are their child’s best advocates. As a parent and your child’s first teacher, you should be informed of the assessment and accountability system that is in place in your child’s school. Parents and families must be at the table with school leaders and school districts to ensure that testing is implemented well and with enough resources to ensure success.

Indiana should include parents and teachers in thoughtful conversations based on trust, collaboration and respect. For additional details about the assessment and accountability system, please call the Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) at (317) 232-6610. Here are some questions you might want to ask:

- How many assessments will my child take this school year and where can I access/view the assessment calendar?
- What will happen if my child does not meet proficiency on the new assessments?
- How will the results of tests be used to support my child’s learning?
- What can I do, as a parent, to help my child do his or her best?
- How will school evaluations be affected based on results of the new assessments?

Also, be sure to speak with your local school administrators! Ask them to host a parent night in the spring to explain the tests, and in the fall to explain test results.

Below is the list of policies and practices that National PTA supports. Check with the IDOE to determine if their policies and practices are closely aligned with those of the PTA.

- National PTA believes that valid assessment does not consist of only a single test score, and that at no time should a single test be considered the sole determinant of a student’s academic or work future.
- National PTA supports nationally agreed upon voluntary standards if they are derived by consensus at the state and local levels. Parents must be involved in this process.
- National PTA believes that assessments provide valuable information to parents, teachers and school leaders about the growth and achievement of their students. Furthermore, having annual data on the performance of students can help inform teaching and learning as well as identify achievement gaps among groups of students within a school and among a school district. National PTA believes assessments are essential to ensure that all students receive a high-quality education.
Prepare and Supporting Your Child

- Review the testing calendar and work with your child’s school to ensure there will be regular and clear communications from the school on the assessments, the results, and how they are used.
- Discuss the new tests with your child. Make sure he or she feels comfortable and understands the importance of taking the test.
- With older children, explain that the new assessments were created to make sure they are on track to succeed after graduation and to identify any issues early enough to give them more support.
- Explain to your child that the tests will initially be more challenging. Tell your child you have high expectations and you and the teachers are there to help every step of the way.
- Review test results with your child and his or her teacher.
- Make sure your child has a comfortable place for studying and is prepared mentally and physically for a test.

Staying informed and involved

- Visit: doe.in.gov/standards to become familiar with Indiana’s new College-and-Career Ready Academic Standards.
- Visit: doe.in.gov/assessment/istep-grades-3-8 and doe.in.gov/assessment/istep-grade-10 to learn more about grade-specific versions of the ISTEP+ assessment.
- Read all comments written by the teacher on classroom lessons and tests. Ask teachers to explain anything that is unclear and discuss how you can best work together to address areas of improvement for your child.
- Monitor your child’s progress and regularly communicate with your child’s teachers. If your child needs extra help or wants to learn more about a subject, work with his or her teacher to identify opportunities for tutoring, after-school clubs or other resources.
- Remember that tests are not perfect measures of what a child can do—there are many other factors that might influence a test score. For example, a child can be affected by the way he or she is feeling on test day or the particular classroom setting.
- Meet with your child’s teacher as often as possible to discuss his or her progress. Ask for activities to do at home to help prepare for tests and improve your child’s proficiency.

Additional resources

- Visit the Indiana Department of Education’s website: doe.in.gov