

Myths and Facts about PARCC in Illinois

MYTH: Federal and state governments will withhold Title I Funding for our schools because of opt outs

FACT: No state or district has ever lost federal funds because of opt outs

There is no federal or state law that *requires* financial or other penalties for schools or districts if parents opt out or refuse the test. After two years of mass opt outs across the country, the US Dept of Education (US ED) has still never penalized any states or districts for having high opt-out rates on state-mandated tests.

Restriction of funding to a state or district is a mechanism that the US ED has to enforce *any* provision of federal education law in order to impose sanctions for serious, willful violations by states and district officials. Parent and student refusal to participate in testing—when a district or state makes a good faith effort to administer the test to all eligible students—does not fall within that parameter.

The [IL NCLB waiver](#) in force until August 2016 has no financial penalties for low participation rates. [The 2015 “Every Student Succeeds Act” \(ESSA\)](#), which replaces NCLB, requires states to administer the test to not less than 95% of all students but leaves it up to the state to determine how this requirement “will factor...into the statewide accountability system” to be implemented for 2017-18. [Sec. 1111(b)(4)(E)]

Federal and state education authorities will likely continue to make threats about withholding funds as they have in the past, including in [December 2016](#). However, given the wide-ranging support for opt out in Illinois and around the country, it would likely be extremely politically damaging for any public official to actually carry out such a threat.

We judge the risks for our public school system of continuing to participate in high-stakes standardized testing used for accountability to be greater than the risks of non-participation.

MYTH: There is no "opting out" of PARCC

FACT: Your child can refuse the test

Students **can** refuse PARCC testing. Parents should notify their school in writing that their child is refusing the test and that they expect their child to be treated with kindness and respect.

Although the IL State Board of Education has said that “Opting out is not an option,” they have also said districts “can develop a policy for those students who refuse to take assessments on testing days.” The state instructs schools not to acknowledge parent refusals on behalf of their children; special needs children, children with anxiety and children as young as 8 are still expected to refuse the test themselves.

We are working to get an opt out bill passed in IL, HB306. We need your help; please [call and tell your state senator](#) to support HB306 so that there is a clear and humane policy for families who do not want their children to take PARCC or other state-mandated assessments.

MYTH: Illinois would lose millions in federal funding if the opt out bill HB 306 became law

FACT: Other states already have laws clearly permitting opt out of state-mandated testing

The following states have opt out laws: [California](#), [Wisconsin](#), [Utah](#), [Pennsylvania](#), Nebraska, [Oregon](#), [Colorado](#). Other states, like Washington, have allowed parents to opt their children out without formal provisions with no adverse consequences. Some other states, including North Carolina and Massachusetts, with no opt out provision in law or regulation have informed school districts they should create alternative education settings for children whose parents refuse the tests. In addition, ESSA is explicit that its provisions do not preempt a state or local law allowing parents to decline to have their children participate in the academic assessments [Sec. 1111(b)(2)(K)].

MYTH: PARCC is a valid and reliable measure of student learning and school performance

FACT: PARCC has not been shown to be valid and reliable

A year after PARCC testing first took place and two years after field testing, neither PARCC nor IL have released any technical reports on the validity or reliability of PARCC scores.

Even though passing rates on online vs pencil-paper tests differed [by as much as 18 percentage points in IL](#) and elsewhere, [PARCC officials have no plans to adjust scores to account for this](#). Normally, standardized test developers spend considerable effort to counter what are known as *mode effects*.

Only [a single study](#) exists of PARCC's value as a predictor of college performance. It administered PARCC to college students and found that PARCC scores correlated with college grades about as strongly as SAT scores. But [high school report card grades are the best predictor](#) of college performance, better than any standardized test scores.

MYTH: PARCC is the only way to truly assess our students

FACT: Standardized testing provides an incomplete picture of what students are learning and how schools are performing

Teachers assess students every single day in the classroom. Parents see the results through quizzes, tests, projects, homework and through these results have the ability to see how their child is learning and what problems they may need to work on at home and school. PARCC results will not be provided this year until early summer -- so the results have little use for teachers. In any case, standardized testing is primarily a measure of the socio-economic characteristics of a school's community.

At this time, only six states plus the District of Columbia are still participating in PARCC testing this year: Colorado, Illinois, Maryland, New Jersey, New Mexico and Rhode Island. Since its inception, [18 states have dropped out of the PARCC consortium](#).

MYTH: Students have never opted out of a state test; it can't be done

FACT: Hundreds of thousands of students opted out of state tests last year

44,000 students across Illinois did not participate in PARCC last year. In Chicago alone, more than 20,000 students refused. [Across the country about 620K students opted out](#), including 200K in New York State even though NYS has no laws about opt out.

MYTH: Children opting out of PARCC must be kept home during the test window

FACT: Your child can refuse the test at school and do an alternative activity

Write a letter to your child's principal to let them know that your child will refuse testing. Explain that ISBE says that districts can create their own refusal policy. State that your child will be reading a book or engaging in another quiet activity during testing time.

MYTH: Students might be held back or not graduate if they refuse PARCC this year

FACT: PARCC is not attached to any high-stakes decisions for students this year

Ask to be shown policies in writing if administrators make threats like this. There has only been one year of PARCC testing, so schools and districts have little basis for attaching their own high-stakes policies to PARCC scores.

The IL School Code was modified in July 2015 to require the high school test required for graduation to be a college entrance exam. [ISBE approved the SAT](#) for this in November. PARCC is not accepted as college entrance exam (and is unlikely to be any time soon). Individual districts could make PARCC a graduation requirement, but high school PARCC tests are tied to coursework, and so [some students in every grade are not even eligible to take it](#), making a graduation requirement difficult to formulate.

More Than A Score

