The State Assessment System

1. What is the state assessment program in Illinois?

The two regular state assessments for Illinois are the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) and the Prairie State Achievement Exam (PSAE). The ISAT is administered in the following grades and content areas:

- Grades 3, 5, and 8: Reading, Writing and Mathematics
- Grades 4 and 7: Science and Social Science

The PSAE is administered at the 11\textsuperscript{th} grade in Reading, Writing, Mathematics, Science and Social Science.

There are two other components of the state assessment system: the Illinois Measure of Annual Growth in English (IMAGE) and the Illinois Alternate Assessment (IAA). The IMAGE measures the progress of Limited English Proficiency (LEP) students in attaining the English-language reading and writing skills needed to achieve the Illinois Learning Standards.

The IAA is the state-developed portfolio assessment that must be used for any special education-eligible student whose Individualized Education Program (IEP) indicates that he/she is unable to participate in the ISAT or PSAE, even with accommodations. It represents a multi-disciplinary approach to assessment of student learning, access to and progress toward the state standards, and opportunities to learn.

2. Are ISAT and PSAE sample materials available?

Sample items for ISAT and PSAE content area tests are available on the ISBE website (www.isbe.state.il.us/isat/Default.html).

3. Is it mandatory that every student participate in state and district-wide assessments?

Yes, every student enrolled in a public school district, including students with disabilities, must participate in state and district-wide assessments. Students with disabilities include those students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and those with Section 504 Plans. The only students with disabilities who can be exempted from participation are those who have been convicted as adults under State law and incarcerated in adult prisons.
4. **Why are students with IEPs required to participate in the state assessment program?**

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997 (IDEA ’97), state and local education agencies must ensure that students with disabilities are involved and make progress in the general curriculum to the maximum extent possible. Because the state assessment program is aligned with and designed to measure progress on the Illinois Learning Standards, student participation will provide critical information about the individual’s progress and the progress of schools.

Using the state assessment results will encourage schools to direct instructional attention and resources to all students who are assessed, which in turn will lead to improved student learning. The goal of holding schools accountable for every student’s performance is to increase the achievement of students, including those with disabilities. This information will also enable IEP teams to more appropriately assess students’ progress in the general curriculum.

5. **Does a school’s Title I eligibility affect the requirements for assessment?**

No, state assessment requirements are the same for all schools, regardless of Title I eligibility.

6. **At what grade levels should children who are educated in a non-graded system be assessed?**

Districts have the prerogative and responsibility to decide who is in a particular grade and to administer assessments appropriate to that grade.

7. **Can out-of-level testing be used for state and district-wide assessments?**

Out-of-level testing, which refers to allowing a student in one grade level to use a version of a test that was designed for students in another (usually lower) grade level, is not permitted on the state assessments in Illinois.

8. **What is the “attemptedness criterion?”**

The “attemptedness criterion” relates to the ISAT and PSAE. It means that the student must respond to at least a few items in each session of the content area before a score will be returned. For example, suppose a student completes both sessions of the science test on the ISAT, completes session 1 of the social sciences test, but is absent and cannot make up session 2 of the social sciences test. The student will receive a score for science but not for social sciences.

9. **If a student with a disability takes the ISAT or the PSAE, will the student’s score be included in school, district, and state results?**

Yes.
10. **How are ISAT and PSAE scores reported for those students with disabilities whose IEPs require placement in a school or facility other than their home school?**

The scores will be reported to each student’s home school. It is then the responsibility of the home school to provide copies of all applicable individual scores reported for their students with IEPs to parents/guardians of these students, the receiving school, and the joint agreement (if applicable).

11. **Are districts required to give district-wide assessments?**

No, districts are not required to give district-wide assessments. However, if a district does administer such assessments, then students with IEPs must participate. Those students with IEPs who are determined unable to participate in the regular district-wide assessment, even with accommodations, must be given an alternate assessment. Every district has the responsibility of developing and conducting the alternate assessment and adopting local guidelines for participation and should have done so by July 1, 2000.

**Accommodations**

12. **What accommodations might seriously compromise the validity of a test?**

When considering accommodations and their potential effect on test validity, it is recommended that the test manual be consulted for information on allowable accommodations. Three criteria are essential when considering any test accommodation:

a. The accommodation should allow the test score to reflect the student’s proficiency in the area tested, not the disability addressed in the IEP.

b. The accommodation should not compromise the purpose of the test. For example, the ISAT reading test cannot be read to a student because it destroys the purpose of the test. However, part or all of the ISAT science test can be read to a student whose IEP specifies a reading disability. This is because the primary purpose of the test is to measure science knowledge and skills, not reading.

c. The accommodation should not compromise test security. All conditions pertaining to test security and return of test materials after the test is administered still apply.

13. **What accommodations are available to use with the ISAT and PSAE?**

The term “accommodations” refers to changes in setting, timing, scheduling, presentation format, and/or method of response that do not alter what the test was designed to measure or the comparability of scores. A variety of accommodations have been used to provide fair testing conditions for students with IEPs or Section 504 Plans who take the ISAT or PSAE. For example, changes in the presentation format (large print, Braille, audiotape) or method of response (transcribed oral responses) may appropriately accommodate a wide range of disabilities.
However, appropriate accommodations for any given student will be specific to that child’s needs, as addressed by the IEP or Section 504 Plan, should reflect those accommodations used in the instruction of the student, and should meet the general criteria listed in Question #12 above.

14. **What alternatives are available in terms of methods of response?**

   a. **Can students dictate their responses to the writing tests and then transcribe them?**

      Yes, if this is the method by which the student typically completes writing assignments. Whatever is dictated must be transcribed verbatim (by a teacher) to the scanable sheet.

   b. **Can a student dictate a response, the teacher record it in writing and the student copy it?**

      Yes, if this is the method by which the student typically completes writing assignments and the student copies the response verbatim.

**The Participation Decision**

15. **Who makes the determination of how a student with an IEP will participate in state or district-wide assessments?**

    The IEP team, including parents, makes this determination.

16. **Is parental permission required for students with disabilities to participate in state and district-wide assessment?**

    Parental permission is not required for students with disabilities to participate in state and district-wide assessments, unless it is a requirement for nondisabled students. In Illinois parental permission is not required for student participation in the state assessment. It is important to remember, though, that parents are members of the IEP team and must be involved in the team’s decisions about how an individual student will participate in state and district-wide assessment programs.

17. **What criteria does the IEP team use to make the participation decision?**

    For the ISAT and PSAE, the IEP team should use the state-recommended participation criteria in making this decision. For district-wide assessments, the team should use the local participation criteria adopted by the district. Critical factors to consider include the content and format of the test, what the student has been taught in the general curriculum content area(s) related to the Illinois Learning Standards, and whether or not needed accommodations will compromise the validity of the test in question.
Please keep in mind that the state-established participation criteria are recommended, not mandated, and the IEP team has the authority to make the final decision about how a student will participate in the assessment process. Once the IEP team applies the criteria, considers the critical factors mentioned above, and makes the decision about how the student will participate in the state assessment, the method of participation must be specified in the student’s IEP.

18. **Can students with disabilities do partial testing of ISAT? The PSAE?**

Students with IEPs may take part or all of the ISAT with or without accommodations. If, based on the participation criteria, the IEP team makes the decision that the student will participate in the ISAT only for certain content areas assessed at the relevant grade level, then the student will participate in the IAA for the other content areas.

Students with IEPs must take the entire PSAE, with accommodations if needed, or participate in the IAA. Thus, if the IEP team determines that the student should not participate in one or more parts of the PSAE, then the student would participate in the IAA for all content areas assessed by the PSAE.

19. **What if the IEP team determines that a student needs accommodations to take the ISAT or PSAE?**

The IEP team must identify the needed accommodations that compensate for the effect(s) of a student’s disability, ensure that the accommodations do not compromise the validity of the test, and then specify the accommodations in the student’s IEP. In addition, because the PSAE includes the ACT Assessment, an accommodation request form provided by ACT must be completed and submitted to ACT for review and approval prior to test administration. This form is provided directly to high schools by ACT, along with instructions for its completion and submission.

20. **What if the IEP team determines that the regular state or district-wide assessment is not appropriate for the student?**

The IEP must state why the student cannot take the regular assessment even with accommodations. For the state assessment, the IEP must indicate that the IAA will be used. For district-wide assessment, the IEP must describe what alternate assessment, chosen by the district, is to be given.

21. **Can the IEP statement of how the student will participate in state and district-wide assessments be changed without reconvening the IEP team?**

No, the IEP team must reconvene to modify a provision of the IEP. It is allowable for the convened meeting to only address revising the assessment provision of the IEP.
Illinois Alternate Assessment (IAA)

22. What is the IAA?

The IAA is the state alternate assessment for the ISAT and PSAE. It is used for those students with current IEPs whose disabilities preclude their participation in the regular state assessment, even with accommodations. As a component of the state assessment and accountability system, the IAA is aligned with the Illinois Learning Standards and is administered for the same grade levels and subject areas as the ISAT and the PSAE.

23. Can a district decide what to use as the alternate assessment for state tests?

No, the IAA is the only alternate assessment for the state assessment and must be used. In order to report results in the Illinois accountability system, it is critical that the state alternate assessment be a uniformly applied instrument.

24. Who will administer the IAA?

A student’s teacher(s) will administer the IAA, with input from other specialists and parents.

25. How does the IAA portfolio process work?

Conducting the IAA requires that teachers collect evidence of a student’s access to and progress on the Illinois Learning Standards. The Standard Sets of the Learning Standards provide the foundation for collecting such evidence. A Standard Set is the basis by which ISAT scores are reported and encompasses multiple learning standards relevant to a subject area within a particular content area. Along with the learning standards that relate to a Standard Set, critical functions and alternate performance indicators have been developed for the IAA to demonstrate how students with disabilities can show access to the standards in a particular content area. To further guide a teacher in determining if a student is accessing a standard, assessment questions have been developed.

In compiling a student’s IAA portfolio, teachers collect evidence on the Standard Sets from each content area assessed at a given grade level by the ISAT or the PSAE. Evidence is collected four times a year to show the ongoing progress a student is making to access the standards in a content area and in achieving his/her standards-based IEP goals and objectives. Teachers are encouraged to use the same piece of evidence to address more than one content area, if it is applicable to and shows student progress in that area.

26. How is the IAA linked to instruction?

The IAA is aligned with the Illinois Learning Standards and has been designed to be an integral part of instruction and learning, rather than an additional process. As students complete work resulting from instruction aligned with the Illinois Learning Standards
(which should serve as the foundation for all instruction and assessment), this work can be collected as evidence of student progress to be included in the IAA portfolio.

27. **How is the IAA linked to a student’s IEP?**

When a student’s IEP is aligned to the Illinois Learning Standards, evidence collected to demonstrate student progress toward IEP goals and objectives can be included in the IAA portfolio as evidence of progress toward the learning standards. Therefore, it is important that IEP teams develop and document goals and objectives that address the learning standards, as well as instructional approaches, accommodations, modifications, and supports that will enable a student to access those standards.

28. **How many students should be alternately assessed?**

There is no given number. It is essential that the decision regarding a student's need for an alternate assessment be made on an individual basis. The Office of Special Education Programs in Washington, D.C. has estimated that approximately 2% of the total school population, or 15% of the population of students with disabilities, will be alternately assessed. However, this is just an estimated guideline.

29. **Who is responsible for administering the IAA to a student whose IEP requires placement in a school other than his/her home school and how will his/her scores on the IAA be reported?**

The receiving school will be responsible for a student’s IAA portfolio development and the scores will be reported as the state assessment scores are reported, which is to the home school. It is then the responsibility of the home school to provide copies of all applicable individual scores reported for their students with IEPs to parents/guardians of these students, the receiving school and the joint agreement (if applicable).

30. **Who will be administering the IAA in private facilities?**

The person delivering the services to a student will be responsible for administering the alternate assessment. It is, however, the responsibility of the student’s home school district to ensure that the student participates in the assessment and that his/her participation is addressed by the IEP team. Therefore, it is critical that the school district work closely with the private facility to address this issue.

31. **Are private facilities receiving training?**

Yes, private facilities personnel have been provided the opportunity to participate in training on the IAA.