



Illinois State Board of Education

100 North First Street • Springfield, Illinois 62777-0001
www.isbe.net

James T. Meeks
Chairman

Tony Smith, Ph.D.
State Superintendent of Education

Frequently Asked Questions:

95% Participation in State Assessments

Q-1. What is the basis for the requirement that at least 95 percent of eligible students participate in state accountability assessments?

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which was signed into law in 2015, reauthorized the 50-year-old Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the country's national education law and longstanding commitment to equal opportunity for all students. ESSA, a law that has bipartisan support, tasks individual states to create a plan to ensure every child is learning and on the path to college and career. It includes the requirement of universal participation in state accountability assessments and defines universal participation as at least 95 percent of eligible students.

Q-2. Aside from ensuring compliance with federal law, why is achieving and maintaining 95 percent student participation important?

The 95 percent participation threshold supports student learning in two ways:

- *Transparency* -- The results give parents and families comparable data to understand how their child is progressing and if they are on track for college and career. Our state assessments measure how well students know the rigorous Illinois Learning Standards through complex tasks that require strategic reasoning and extended investigation to solve problems. This transparency allows for a stronger partnership between parents and teachers to proactively address any causes of concern.
- *Equity* -- Standardized assessments allow schools, districts, and states to compare student performance against a common standard. Ensuring at least 95 percent of students participate allows schools, districts, and ISBE to identify trends for different groups of students that might otherwise go unnoticed. This critical data empowers us to ensure all students have the support they need to thrive and to modify our supports and instruction accordingly. The greater the number of students who participate, the more accurate the trend.

Q-3. When will schools be notified of participation rate status and which data collection year will be used for calculations?

Schools will be notified beginning in the 2018-19 school year if they have any subgroups (one or more) that fall below the 95 percent threshold for participation, including the all student group.

The three consecutive years of data used for identification of schools for Targeted Supports and Interventions will be spring 2018, 2019, and 2020 participation data for identification in the 2020-21 school year.

Q-4. What assessments are subject to the 95 percent participation rate?

Per ESSA, participation rates on the English language arts (ELA) and mathematics assessments, both the regular and alternate versions, will be used to identify schools for Targeted Supports and Interventions. The assessments identified below will factor into a participation rate for each subject and for each school, district, and the state.

Grades Tested	Assessments Used in 2018
3-8	PARCC, DLM-AA
11	SAT and DLM-AA

These assessments have and will continue to improve over time, with any future changes representing improvements in content and usability for teachers, administrators, and parents/caregivers. Given that all state accountability assessments must align to the state’s academic learning standards, the level of rigor and expectations should not change drastically from year to year to maintain stability for comparability.

Each student is required to take only one ELA and math assessment per grade level and is counted once per subject. Participation in ELA and math are calculated separately to account for the fact that there are a very small number of students who are only required to take one subject (i.e., homeschool students who receive instruction in just math or English).

Students who take the Dynamic Learning Maps Alternate Assessment (DLM-AA) and choose to take the regular assessment as well (e.g., because they would like to benefit from the free college entrance exam) would receive scores from both exams, but would only count once for participation.

The participation of every student counts toward multiple student groups, including the all student group, gender groups, racial/ethnic groups, as well as English Learners, students with disabilities, and low-income groups.

Participation is calculated by taking the number of students in each subject area (ELA/math) who have scores across all ELA or math assessments for all grade levels served in the school, district, or state. That number is divided by the number of students who tested, or 95 percent of the number of students who should have tested, whichever is larger. Students who were in the hospital, in a locked facility, or whose scores were suppressed for reasons that do not impact participation (e.g., a test irregularity or documentable processing error on the part of the vendor) are dropped from both the numerator and the denominator.

Q-5. Can a student “opt out”? What is the practical impact of students not taking state assessments?

No. There is no “opt out” provision. The expectation in state and federal law that all students must be assessed. The school is legally obligated to present the test to all students. If a student is not in attendance on the day of testing, the school must schedule a make-up session and present the test then.

The goal is to achieve equity and obtain transparent data for families and educators, so refusing to take state assessments jeopardizes the accuracy of student learning data and the ability to utilize that data in support of all students. A single student refusing to take the test reduces the data educators have to design appropriate supports for a specific child. Additionally, the lower the participation rate in a school or district, the less likely educators will have an accurate data picture to provide needed supports for the whole school, impacting all students.

Q-6. What are the impacts students refusing to take the test may have on school and district accountability? Does opting out negatively affect the whole school's "success rate" on the assessment (i.e., does it lower the percentage of students who meet or exceed standards)?

Per Illinois' ESSA Plan, a school cannot receive the Exemplary School designation when it has less than 95 percent eligible student participation for three consecutive years. In addition, ESSA directly incorporates the 95 percent participation threshold into the calculation of proficiency rates for the purposes of accountability. This proficiency rate impacts schools' interim progress measurements and summative designations. The denominator for calculating proficiency for the purposes of accountability is the higher of 95 percent OR the school's actual participation rate. A larger denominator with the same numerator will result in a lower proficiency rate.

Starting in 2018, the percent of students who are proficient will now be calculated two ways. Historically, percent proficient was calculated by taking the number of students who meet or exceed standards and dividing that by the number of students who took the test. In 2018, ISBE will also calculate percent proficient as the number of students who meet or exceed standards, divided by either by the number of students who took the test OR 95 percent of all students who should have tested, whichever is larger.

To illustrate, consider two schools:

- **School A** has 100 students, of which 97 participated in the state assessment, and 40 were designated as proficient or higher. School A's proficiency rate would be 41.2 percent, the result of dividing 40 proficient students by 97 participants.
- **School B** has 100 students, of which only 50 participated in the state assessment, and 21 were designated as proficient and higher. School B will have two proficiency rates. The first would be 42.0 percent, the result of dividing 21 proficient students by 50 participants. The second, which would be used for accountability and measuring interim progress, would be 22.1 percent, the result of dividing 21 proficient students by the minimum participation threshold of 95.

Q-7. Will our school automatically receive the Underperforming School designation if we have a participation rate of less than 95 percent?

No. Schools that do not meet the 95 percent threshold for one or more student groups will not automatically receive the Underperforming School designation. If for three consecutive years a school does not meet the threshold for one or more student groups, they will be notified that they

have a “consistently underperforming” student group. This would make that school eligible for Targeted Support and Interventions and the school would then need to implement a Targeted Improvement Plan.

Q-8. How will an Underperforming School or Lowest Performing School, or having a “consistently underperforming” student group, affect our funding and supports?

A school with the Underperforming School designation or those with a “consistently underperforming” student group will have to develop a Targeted Improvement Plan in partnership with their district and implement corrective measures to address the issue. This may take time and resources.

Schools creating Targeted Improvement Plans are encouraged to access supports through IL-EMPOWER, as well as technical assistance and resources such as toolkits. If, after three years, a school still has one or more subgroups that fail to meet the 95 percent threshold for participation, the school will be identified for Targeted Support and Interventions. A school identified for support will develop a Comprehensive Improvement Plan, which the school district and ISBE must approve. The Comprehensive Improvement Plan will still allow for considerable district and school discretion over specific corrective measures.

Q-9. What are “corrective measures” addressing the issue and what supports are available from ISBE?

ISBE will consider the size and patterns of the school and subgroups that caused the school to be identified and then provide differentiated supports and craft guidance accordingly in the proposed intervention plans.

The corrective measures in a school and district’s Targeted Improvement Plan may be whatever supports and methods best improve assessment participation in their particular school.

95% Participation Status	Actions	
Year 1 2018-19 (spring 2018 participation)	Notification of 1 or more subgroups below 95%. ISBE to provide general support (e.g., toolkit).	
Year 2 2019-20 (spring 2019 participation)	Notification of 2 nd year with 1 or more subgroups below 95%. School connected to a peer mentor.	
Year 3 2020-21 (spring 2020 participation)	Notification of status as a school needing Targeted Supports and Interventions (TSI). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school must create an ESSA plan to address the issue. • The district must approve the plan and monitor implementation. • The school may exit TSI status once all student demographic groups are above the 95 % threshold. 	
TSI Year 1 2021-22 (spring 2021 participation)	School implements its TSI plan.	
	If All Groups Above 95% School exits TSI status.	If Groups Still Below 95% School retains TSI status.

TSI Year 2 2022-23 (spring 2022 participation)	If Groups Fall Below 95% 3-year count begins again. Notification and general support resources.	If Groups Still Below 95% School retains TSI status.
TSI Year 3 2023-24 (spring 2023 participation)	If All Groups Above 95% 3-year count is reset to 0.	If Groups Still Below 95% School is notified of status for Comprehensive Supports and Interventions . School must create an ESSA plan to address the issue. The district and ISBE must review and approve the plan and monitor for improvement.

Q-11. How does IL-EMPOWER work?

The Illinois ESSA Plan introduces IL-EMPOWER, a statewide structure of accountability and support for capacity development with schools and districts. The structure is designed to improve student outcomes by leveraging schools’ strengths and building school staffs’ capacity. ISBE believes the educators closest to students have the most valuable insight into their strengths, challenges, context, and change history. This insight is a pillar upon which differentiated supports are developed.

IL-EMPOWER replaces the single-provider model currently in place and empowers schools with greater choice and collaboration in the school improvement process. The IL-EMPOWER structure promotes collaboration and peer-to-peer learning, informed by data from the IL-EMPOWER needs assessment and equity analysis, as vehicles for educator-led and state-supported school improvement.

IL-EMPOWER is required for the Lowest Performing schools identified to receive comprehensive services (the lowest performing five percent of Title I schools and high schools with a graduation rate below 67 percent). Schools that receive services will complete a needs assessment process using multiple data sources.