



Illinois State Board of Education

November 19, 2013 (Rev. 3/11/15)

Guidance Document 13-21

Non-Regulatory Guidance on the use of Code 15 in Student Assessments

*This document is intended to provide non-regulatory guidance on the subject matter listed above.
For specific questions, please contact the person(s) identified in the document.*

Dr. Christopher Koch, State Superintendent

1. Non-Regulatory Guidance on the Use of Code 15 in Student Assessments

ISBE has become aware of questions and concerns regarding the use of code 15 (“student was presented a test booklet but refused to engage with the test”). ISBE is providing the following information in order to address those questions and concerns and clarify the use of this code.

Pursuant to the School Code (105 ILCS 5/2-3.64a-5) and ISBE administrative rules (23 Ill. Adm. Code 1.30), all students in any public or State-operated elementary school, secondary school, cooperative or joint agreement with a governing body or board of control, charter school operating in compliance with the Charter Schools Law, school operated by a regional office of education under Section 13A-3 of the School Code, or public school administered by a local public agency or the Department of Human Services are required to participate in the State assessment or an alternate form of the assessment. Throughout the testing process, certain students may be designated as “non-testing” for a variety of reasons.

Code 15 is reserved for cases where an individual student is presented with a test booklet and refuses to engage with the test. Students who refuse to engage with the test are considered non-participants. Non-participation is reported to the United States Department of Education annually and **DOES** count against a district’s 95% accountability participation rate.

Code 15 does not apply where a student is influenced by school personnel, either directly or indirectly, to refuse to engage with the test. School personnel who encourage, entice, or otherwise influence students to refuse testing, whether by direct communication with students or indirect communication to parents and/or guardians, will be considered to be engaging in unprofessional conduct as defined in the School Code: “Unprofessional conduct also includes conduct that violates the standards, ethics, or rules applicable to the security, administration, monitoring, or scoring of or the reporting of scores from any assessment test or examination administered under Section 2-3.64a-5 of this Code or that is known or intended to produce or report manipulated or artificial, rather than actual, assessment or achievement results or gains from the administration of those tests or examinations.” (105 ILCS 5/21B-75). This impropriety could result in suspension or revocation of licensure by ISBE.

Further, improper use of code 15 may impact school district recognition status, as recognition status reflects compliance with requirements imposed by law and administrative rule. Pursuant to ISBE’s administrative rules, “[t]he recognition status of a district or a school may be changed by the State Board of Education at any time to reflect information confirmed during compliance monitoring or by any other means.” (23 Ill. Adm. Code 1.20). Therefore, a school district may be “recognized pending further review”, be placed “on probation” or ultimately “non-recognized” before, during, or after testing based on evidence of engaging in or intent to engage in behaviors that would lead to student refusal to test.

ISBE hopes that this information is useful to you in clarifying the application of code 15. If you have further questions regarding this or other assessment topics, please contact Student Assessment at 1-866-317-6034.