

Suggested template for letter to parents or letter to the editor regarding ISAT cut score issue

The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) recently decided to increase the grading scale for the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT). The end result is that the percentage of elementary and middle school students “meeting” or “exceeding” standards is expected to drop substantially when the scores of this year’s test are reported next fall – even though their actual scores may increase.

It is the equivalent of a teacher that was using a grading scale of 90-100 equals an A and 80-89 equals a B and then raising it to 94-100 for an A and 88-93 for a B. A good analogy is a pole vaulter who clears the bar at 12 feet, improves his vault to 13 feet, but cannot clear the bar because it has been raised to 15 feet. His performance improved, but the bar was raised even higher.

What impact will the new grading scale have? By aligning the 2012 test scores to the new scale, the percentage of students statewide who met the standard would have dropped from 86 percent in math and 79 percent in reading to 60 percent in both subjects. Again, that does not reflect any drop in scores, just a raising of the bar.

ISBE’s reasoning for raising the scores needed to “meet” or “exceed” the ISAT standards is to better align the ISAT standards with those of the Prairie State Achievement Exam (PSAE) administered to 11th-grade students in Illinois, as well as to align it with the new federal Common Core standards designed to indicate college and career readiness.

The ISAT or any standardized test is a snapshot in time of a student’s performance. Data can be interpreted or compared in a number of ways. For example, Illinois ranks first in the nation in the percentage of students who meet all four of the American College Testing (ACT) benchmarks for college readiness among the nine states that give the ACT test to all graduating students.

INSERT PARAGRAPH HERE REGARDING ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT DATA OR HONORS FOR YOUR DISTRICT.

While any standardized test score is just a single indicator of student performance and just one piece of the educational picture in a school district, we will continue to study those results and use them to help inform us about aligning our curriculum with the new federal and state standards in ways that are beneficial for our students. What we won’t do is change our instructional methods just to teach to a test or in ways we do not think are beneficial for our students.

The bottom line is that we will continue to strive to provide the best possible educational opportunities for the students in our school district. We appreciate your continued support of the students in our school district.