



# Illinois State Board of Education

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## FAQ for Parents

# Illinois Science Assessment and Illinois Learning Standards in Science

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### 1. Q. Does my school have to administer the Illinois Science Assessment (ISA)?

A. Yes, federal testing requirements call for public schools to assess students in science.

### 2. Q. Who must take the ISA?

A. Public school students enrolled in grades 5 and 8 and any public high school students in grades 9-12 who are enrolled in a course that corresponds to the content of Biology I will take the ISA. Students who are scheduled to take the Dynamic Learning Maps – Alternate Assessment (DLM-AA) do not participate in ISA, as they take the DLM-AA science test in applicable grade levels (i.e., 5, 8, and 11).

### 3. Q. When will students take the ISA?

A. The test window for the first year opened May 2 and will continue through May 27.

### 4. Q. How was the ISA developed?

A. Illinois partnered with the Office of the State Superintendent in the District of Columbia to access items aligned to the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) in order to develop the ISA.

### 5. Q. On what standards is the ISA based?

A. The ISA is aligned with the Illinois Learning Standards in science based on the NGSS, which were adopted in 2014.

### 6. Q. Why did Illinois need new science standards?

A. Illinois' previous science standards were adopted in 1997. Since then, our country has seen major advances in the field and expanded our understanding of how students learn science. Illinois' 1997 science standards needed to be updated accordingly. In January 2014, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) adopted the NGSS as the Illinois Learning Standards in science. These standards replaced the 1997 standards and became effective statewide Feb. 27, 2014, with full implementation set for the 2016-17 school year. To learn more, visit [www.isbe.net/ils/science/pdf/development-of-ngss-fact-sheet.pdf](http://www.isbe.net/ils/science/pdf/development-of-ngss-fact-sheet.pdf).

**7. Q. Should I be concerned that my child is taking the ISA, which is aligned to the new science standards, while the standards are still being implemented at the classroom level?**

**A.** No. Although the new science standards are more comprehensive and rigorous than the 1997 science standards, there are similarities between the two. Many of the new standards correspond to, and build off of, the previous standards.

**8. Q. How are the new Illinois Learning Standards in science different than the previous standards?**

**A.** The Illinois Learning Standards in science emphasize a more engaged, hands-on science education that aims to give students a deeper understanding of the core concepts in science and engineering as well as practice applying those concepts – linking knowledge and real-world skills. Illinois’ science standards consider what it means to be “literate” in science by including the use of technology, critical thinking, and analytical skills. One of the biggest shifts in the transition to the new standards is how they encourage students to engage with science through integrated and interrelated concepts.

**9. Q. How are the new science standards affecting classroom instruction?**

**A.** The Illinois Learning Standards in science are not a curricula but a guide for what students need to know and be able to do by the end of each grade level. High-quality science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) standards help educators teach more effectively, allowing them to focus on how students learn best – in a hands-on, collaborative, and integrated environment rooted in inquiry and discovery. Science teachers across the country are finding that when educators raise expectations and give students the right tools and learning settings, students are capable of remarkable science literacy and achievement.

**10. Q. How will the new science standards benefit my child?**

**A.** Illinois’ science standards connect scientific principles to real-world situations, making content and instruction more engaging and relevant to the topics and activities students experience outside the classroom. The standards also introduce science at an earlier age, when children have many questions about the world and how it works. They build on children’s inherent curiosity. A strong science education equips students with skills that are necessary for all careers. Students need the right foundation to tackle long-term and difficult issues that face our generation and future generations. The Illinois Learning Standards in science are preparing students to enter the workforce with enhanced communication, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills – all vital skills for competing and succeeding in today’s economy.

**11. Q. In what format will ISA be administered?**

**A.** ISA will be administered in an online format.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A limited number of districts were unable to access an online-only format due to device incompatibility (iPad only). These districts are being issued a paper version.

**12. Q. What types of items or questions will appear on the ISA?**

- A. Each test (5, 8, high school) will begin with reading passages, called scenarios, and will be followed by a series of test items. Some items will be open-ended, some will be multiple-choice, and some will include dropdown selections or other technology-enhanced choices. Each test will also include stand-alone, multiple-choice items that do not follow a scenario.

**13. Q. How much time is allotted for ISA?**

- A. Students must complete the test in one day. The table below shows the estimated time of testing, but this is not a time limit. Districts have flexibility to allow students to continue testing during the session if they are actively engaged with the assessment.

Test	Number of Items	Before/After Time (in minutes)	Estimated Test Time (in minutes)	Total Time (in minutes)
Grade 5	18	15	38	53
Grade 8	23	15	40	55
High School	21	15	32	47

The times above are estimates based on operational testing in Washington, D.C. ISBE does NOT impose a time limit other than the session cannot span over two days. Districts have the flexibility to continue testing if students are still working during the session.