

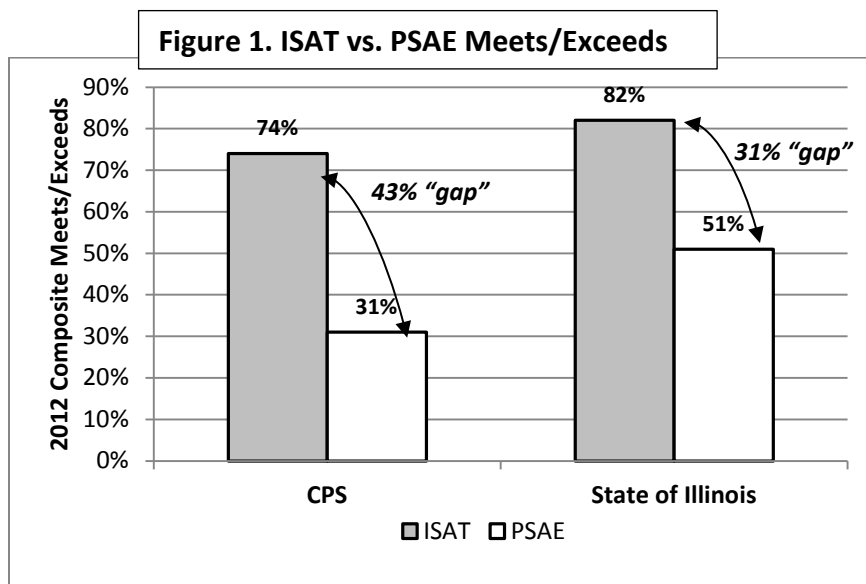
December 4, 2012

ISAT PERFORMANCE TO DECLINE DRAMATICALLY IN 2013

Chicago, IL –Many schools, administrators and parents across Chicago take pride in the high percentages of their students that “meet” or “exceed” ISAT standards. However, changes will occur in 2013 that are expected to dramatically lower these percentages by 30% or more.

As part of its deal to receive a waiver from NCLB sanctions, the State of Illinois agreed to raise its 2013 ISAT cut scores to be better aligned with PSAE standards. In addition, the State of Illinois is incorporating Common Core content into its assessments sooner than originally announced. In March 2013, 20-30% of ISAT items will reflect Common Core standards. This number will increase further in 2014 to as high as 40-50%.

In 2012, 74% of CPS students (vs. 82% state wide) met or exceeded ISAT standards while only 31% of CPS students (vs. 51% state wide) met or exceeded PSAE standards. This has led to a gap in CPS and State of Illinois ISAT vs. PSAE performance of 43% and 31% respectively. Closing this gap by increasing ISAT cut scores to better align with PSAE achievement will lead to a significant drop – *in the range of 25-30% statewide*—of the elementary school student population that is at or above standards. This drop could be even larger in CPS – *perhaps as high as 30-35%* – in the percent of students who meet or exceed standards.



The ISAT test focuses on reading and math and is administered to students in grades 3 through 8. The PSAE, taken by 11th graders, is a combination of the ACT and additional assessments in science, reading and applied mathematics that are designed to measure college and career readiness. In its waiver request, the Illinois State Board of Education does not attribute this drop in proficiency between the ISAT and PSAE to a drop in student learning but to a “misalignment” between ISAT and PSAE “meets standards” scores.

The ISAT is considered one of the least rigorous among the 50 mandated state assessments, particularly in math – ranking as low as 48th among 50. The incorporation of Common Core standards will increase the difficulty of tests nation-wide – but will have a particularly large impact on weaker tests – like the ISAT – making them significantly more difficult.

SelectivePrep feels that the movement to Common Core standards will have the most noticeable impact on the ISAT’s math section. While the math topics that students must master at each grade level will stay fairly consistent – at least initially – the complexity of questions will shift upwards. Students will need to solve more problems with multiple steps and ones that incorporate different topics within the same question. Changes in the reading area will be more subtle. Passages will become denser and vocabulary will be more complex – and students will be responsible for understanding a writer’s style and interpreting intent at an earlier grade.

The effect of higher cut scores along with a more difficult test will be particularly pronounced among schools with lower achieving student populations overall and less challenging curriculums. These ISAT changes could deliver particularly punishing grades to neighborhood schools and schools in more impoverished areas. Parents who were previously pleased with their child’s academic performance could be in for a rude awakening as scores plummet.

While the immediate impact could be shocking, SelectivePrep feels that these tougher standards will be beneficial longer term. Parents will get a more accurate understanding of their child’s academic performance at an earlier age and can make adjustments to raise achievement before 11th grade PSAE scores arrive. A tougher test will also better differentiate student performance – particularly at the high end. With the current easy ISAT test, students with different levels of knowledge are “achieving” the same percentile. In the future, students who have greater subject mastery will be

rewarded with higher scores. Finally, as student assessments toughen, elementary schools will be encouraged to make their curriculum more challenging.

According to Matthew Greenberg, partner of educational services firm SelectivePrep, “The discussion of increases in ISAT cut scores and Common Core standards can easily cause people’s eyes to glaze over. I’m not sure that parents appreciate the magnitude of what is about to happen.” Greenberg continued, “Parents of students in “ISAT decision years” – 7th grade for Selective Enrollment High School admissions or 5th grade for Academic Centers – need to be particularly diligent in tracking these developments and preparing their children.”

About SelectivePrep

SelectivePrep was founded by test prep veterans with over 25 years of test preparation experience – and extensive backgrounds in both classroom teaching and curriculum development. SelectivePrep offers the *only* classroom program that prepares students for both of the standardized tests needed to gain admission to a Selective Enrollment High School and the Academic Center Admissions Test. SelectivePrep knows what it takes to train and motivate students who are intent upon gaining admission to one of the nine Chicago Selective Enrollment High Schools or one of seven Academic Centers. SelectivePrep’s programs provide a thorough and rigorous review of test content, so students can approach these competitive admissions processes with confidence.

For additional information and registration go to www.selectiveprep.com or call (312) 409-8411.