Dear Parents:

As we move closer to the time that your child(ren) will be taking the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT), I wanted to make sure you are aware of some changes.

The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) recently decided to increase the grading scale for the 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.

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. However, we should also be prepared that fewer buildings will meet AYP (adequate yearly progress).

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.

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. We will be working closely with neighboring districts and the State to identify a further analysis of this change and its effect on our district.

Ellen Correll