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The "Year of Over Testing"

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It's always fun in January to identify the name of the Chinese lunar calendar for the New Year. While we are aware that 2015 is the Year of the Goat, in education circles we are calling this year the "Year of Over Testing."

For high schools in Illinois, along with the annual college admissions ACT, spring Advanced Placement exams and the usual end of course exams, we are now implementing the new PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers) assessments in English 1 and algebra 1 for all students in these courses (mostly freshmen). The PARCC assessment also will be given to all students in grades 3-8, also in math and English. This new rigorous assessment, based on the Common Core Standards, will measure not only students' knowledge of content, but also their ability to analyze, reason and problem solve. This lengthy computer-based exam will allow for tracking each student's growth toward key career and college readiness standards, thus ramping up the accountability.

As we watch the national debate and discussion regarding testing and accountability, we know that 2015 is a pivotal year. So, as we embark further into this "Year of Over Testing," let's make a few key predictions of what will happen as students, teachers, parents, school districts and the general public contend with over testing. These predictions include the following:

**Unaware Universities and Colleges**. Ask any university admissions official about the PARCC assessments and you will get a confused and bewildered look. Because of this lack of engagement and ownership by post-secondary schools, the credibility, purpose and role of the PARCC assessment as a college admissions measure will continue to be undermined.

**Disengaged High School Students** - Because the ACT has been a key criteria that colleges and universities have used in the application/selection process, parents and students will question the value and purpose of the PARCC assessments. Because high school students will have little "skin in the game," they may not have the intrinsic motivation and necessary effort for success. We know it's hard to fool a teen-ager!

**Less Joy and Wonder for Learning** - For grades 3-8, the PARCC assessment will replace the ISAT (Illinois Standard Achievement Test.) The PARCC exam is longer and significantly more rigorous. This increased level of critical thinking and analysis required in answering questions will require a new kind of persistence and focus on the part of students. States that have already implemented the PARCC exams, including Kentucky and New York, have noted high levels of student frustration and anxiety.

**Frustrated Teachers** – Rolling out the high stakes PARCC assessments without a trial implementation year has caused undue stress and anxiety on the part of instructors. No

rehearsals, exhibition and pre-season to ensure a smooth transition. This will result in stifled creativity and “teaching to the test”.

**Logistical Quandaries** – The much longer PARCC exams come in two waves, with the performance-based assessment in early spring and the end-of-year portion during the last weeks of school. Along with the Advanced Placement, ACT and end of course assessments, you will hardly find a day this spring that is not disrupted by testing. Additionally, many school districts lack the technological infrastructure to provide the online testing.

Each local school district embraces a comprehensive K-12 assessment system that supports accountability, informs instruction, is used as a metric for college admissions and is aligned to college and career readiness skills, including the Common Core. Unfortunately, implementation of the PARCC assessments is bound to miss the mark on this standard. In this “Year of Over Testing,” we’re holding our students and teachers to higher standards. If only we held the PARCC policymakers and planners to a similarly high bar.