



# Indiana Statewide Testing for Educational Progress (ISTEP+) Program

## Understanding the ISTEP+ Program

Indiana has a thorough program to assess all public school students in the state to make sure they are progressing toward reaching the academic standards established by the state Department of Education. The Indiana Statewide Testing for Educational Progress (ISTEP+) Program has been developing since the late 1980's in an effort to create a system that fairly assesses the skills and knowledge that students are gaining.

There are many purposes for the assessments given with a school year. Some of them may be diagnostic in nature to help a teacher know what her students are able to do before instruction begins; other assessments monitor the progress of students, educators and schools in helping children master their subjects. With the No Child Left Behind Act, the goal was established that all schools be teaching 100% of their students to proficiency levels by the 2014; the assessments used in the ISTEP+ Program are the accountability tool to monitor this progress.

Children in Indiana are taught based on the curriculum developed in a framework called the Common Core State Standards. These learning standards were adopted in 2010 in English Language Arts and Mathematics. The state has developed other learning objectives for other subject areas. The assessments given in the ISTEP+ Program are aligned to the learning objectives laid out in the curriculum. These objectives state the major skills and concepts a student needs to gain in each subject; it does not prescribe lesson plans.

Starting in 3rd grade, Indiana students begin taking ISTEP+ assessments. On a yearly basis, through 8<sup>th</sup> grade, students will take the ISTEP+ Assessments in English/language arts and Mathematics. In 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade students are also assessed in Science. In 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grades, students are assessed in Social Studies.

Students in grades 3-8 also take a diagnostic assessment called Acuity. This is a measure of what students know and can do prior to a teacher beginning instruction. Students are assessed in their abilities in English/language arts, mathematics, science and social studies. Not all districts give this assessment; districts must apply to utilize this assessment tool.

In High School students take ISTEP+ End-of-Course Assessments (ECA's) in Algebra I, Biology I and English 10. The graduation requirements in Indiana call for students to demonstrate mastery of the Indiana Academic Standards as assessed on the Algebra I and English 10 End-of-Course Assessments (ECA's).

## Format of the ISTEP+ Program

For students in grades 3 who take the ISTEP+ in English/Language Arts and Mathematics they are given one assessment booklet asking questions in multiple-choice format and calling for some applied skills. These assessments are given more than once during the school year.

For students in grades 4-8, the ISTEP+ assessment consists of one assessment booklet for the Applied Skills Assessment that is given in March and one answer booklet for the Multiple-Choice Assessment given in May. Schools will make decisions about whether to administer the test in a paper-and-pencil format or online.

When student in grades 4 and 6 take the Science assessment, and in 5 and 7 take the Social Studies assessment, those questions are a part of the assessment booklet a student is given and students do not receive an individual test in this subject.

When students are in high school they take ISTEP+ End-of-Course Assessments (ECA's) in Algebra I, Biology I and English 10. The Algebra I assessment has four types of questions: constructed-response, multiple-choice, gridded-response and graphing. Students may use calculators on portions of the assessment.

The English 10 assessment asks three types of questions: constructed-response, multiple-choice and a writing prompt calling for a short essay response. Biology I asks constructed-response and multiple-choice questions. These assessments are all given toward the end of the school year.

### **Taking the ISTEP+ Program**

The assessments given are aligned to the Indiana Academic Standards which describes learning standards intended for each subject. Additionally, in conjunction with many other states, Indiana adopted the Common Core Standards in English/Language Arts and Mathematics.

The Common Core Standards calls for students to be proficient in reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language (grammar, conventions). In mathematics, students need to be able to solve problems, use reasoning, use modeling and other analytic tools. The Common Core Standards were developed amongst educators, school administrators, teacher preparatory programs and other professional development forums. They do not give specific direction to how these areas must be taught, but provide an overview for preparing to meet curriculum standards.

Whether students are meeting these curriculum standards is seen on the ISTEP+ Program assessments. The standards that educators use are in the process of revision; the state decommissioned the Indiana Standards Resource website in the beginning of 2012 and the current information would be best located with each district.

For students who require testing accommodations per an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) those are made available; for students with more severe disabilities there are alternative or modified assessments offered.

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