

# HOT TOPICS

## Curriculum Design

Now that the first unit of study is underway we want to commend the staff for the outstanding teamwork, planning, and preparation to launch this first unit. Many teachers have commented that while it is challenging work, they are already seeing the benefits in terms of student excitement and learning. Here are some next steps related to curriculum design and revision.



The Unit Builder tool is under development and will provide a powerful way to create, collaborate, and share units and lessons. Ultimately, the unit builder (new name for the tool to come in the future) will provide a place for staff to build units, build lessons, house curriculum documents including a district curriculum map, create lesson planning calendars, and provide resources for parent support. Staff are invited to view the tool and give feedback on the progress we've made to date. Dates are: Monday, Nov. 17 at 4:15 or Tuesday, Nov. 18 at 3:15 and both sessions are in the Board Room.

Science CDT Teams are meeting this week. At the Junior High level, the teams are continuing the work that started this summer by building the units for this year. At the elementary level, as a short term plan for this year, the teams (2-3 per grade) are making additions to the FOSS units to add elements of UbD, Common Core, and Next Generation Science Standards.

CDT teams, made up of both new and current members, will be coming together in December and January to continue curriculum design work. We were excited to have 50 new applicants for the CDT Teams and look forward to creating great teams that include a blend of new and current members. The teams will do some reflection on the current unit and then develop the next unit. The schedule and team composition for this work will be sent out within a week.

## PARCC PLACE

Welcome to PARCC Place, the new PARCC update forum, written by Randy Haack. This is the inaugural edition of the forum that I will use this to provide periodic updates on "all things PARCC".

I thought I'd start by giving you the basics of the PARCC test. The first thing you should know is that PARCC was written to measure student mastery towards the Common Core State Standards. So the PARCC test is really a tool to help us determine if students are on track to be college and/or career ready when they graduate high school. PARCC is more authentic than our prior Illinois assessments (ISAT), inviting students to think deeply and construct their own solutions to challenging tasks and situations. Since we have just begun creating and implementing new curriculum, we know that it will take a few years until our students are fully ready to excel on this type of assessment.

Nevertheless, our students in grades 3 through 8 will begin taking PARCC this spring and will take two separate tests, so we want teachers to be aware of the details for planning purposes. The first is a Performance Based Assessment (PBA) which will be given between March 2nd and March 20th, and the second is an End of Year (EOY) assessment which is administered between April 27th and May 22nd. More about the organization and number of the tests can be found at <http://www.isbe.net/assessment/pdfs/2015/parcc/parcc-unit-times14-15.pdf>.



If you have not had a chance to take the test (or at least look at it) I encourage you to go to <http://parcc.pearson.com/practice-tests/> and take a practice test. Taking a practice test will give staff a glimpse at what is ahead for students, but this does not mean that we expect or encourage teachers to plan test prep or drills for their students. Our planning remains focused on building understanding and success for life.



## Assessment Calendar

When the Assessment Calendar was drafted for 14-15 the winter and spring dates were purposefully not included since there were “unknowns” about what impact the FAST pilot and PARCC testing would have on the second half of the school year. We now have this information and a finalized testing calendar has been developed based on the input of the Assessment Task Force (ATF). ([link to calendar](#))

The shift from ISAT to PARCC impacts the testing calendar since there are two PARCC spring assessments. The ATF considered options for reducing the impact in light of this common problem for all school districts this year. While we can't currently eliminate tests from the schedule, we have altered the testing calendar to balance the amount of testing between these months and expanded the testing windows to provide more flexibility. Please note that not all grade levels take all of the tests on the calendar and the increased use of computer-based testing should hopefully help us complete testing more efficiently. As we plan for next year, we again will be looking at ways to reduce testing time and the impact on instruction.

## Rising Star Plans

With the NCLB waiver that was approved for Illinois, we are no longer required to use Rising Star as a mandated school improvement tool. However, since effective schools engage in ongoing school improvement planning, and since our administrators and BLTs are familiar with the Rising Star system, it makes sense to continue to use Rising Star system to organize school improvement efforts. BLTs will continue to assess indicators and create/monitor plans, though the compliance deadlines are no longer in effect. Moving forward we will collect some information from BLTs about what is working/not working with Rising Star and revise plans for future implementation accordingly.

*\* In addition, as we look to add elementary schools as Title I schools to potentially expand full day Kindergarten, the Rising Star system will help schools that are not currently Title I prepare for school-wide Title I implementation.*