

Parent's Backpack Guide to The New Illinois Learning Standards



6th – 8th Grade

In 2010 Illinois adopted the New Illinois Learning Standards (Common Core) to make sure all students succeed once they graduate from high school. These standards were written by educators and education experts, including teachers from our state, to provide a consistent, clear and challenging set of learning expectations for all students. The standards are research-based to incorporate findings from other high-achieving countries and the expectations of today's college coursework and career demands. While our state Board of Education adopts standards for our schools, it's up to our districts and teachers to develop their lesson plans and decide on curricular materials.

Why Are the New Illinois Learning Standards Important?

The New Illinois Learning Standards are important because they will help all children learn the skills and knowledge to help them become college and career ready when they graduate. The new standards set clear expectations for what your child should know and be able to do in key areas: reading, writing, speaking and listening, language and mathematics.

These standards raise the bar for student expectations at each grade level and ensure classroom learning builds on the prior year's learning and prepares students for the next year.

What changes are occurring in your child's classroom?

The New Illinois Learning Standards make several important changes to previous standards. These changes are called shifts. Changes in classrooms focus on developing students' critical thinking and communication skills, as well as helping students understand how classroom learning relates to the real world. Student-led and small group work is emphasized to foster strong communication and collaboration skills, which are critical to their success in subsequent grades and everyday life. And just as important, these standards will encourage deeper understanding of concepts, leading your child to be more engaged with his or her own learning – asking more questions, basing arguments on evidence, making connections to other disciplines, and understanding the “why” and the “how” in addition to the “what.”

The chart below shows what these shifts change and what you might see in students' backpacks.

6th – 8th Grade English Language Arts and Literacy in Content Areas

What's Shifting	What You May See in the Backpack
Building Knowledge through content-rich non-fiction.	Reading and writing tasks on real-life events, such as historical events, science, biographies and news articles.
Reading, writing, and speaking and listening grounded in evidence from text, both literary and non-fiction.	Assignments that require students to point out facts and information in a text to support their answers and opinions. Expect to see prompts such as, “how do you know that?” or “where did you find that information?” on assignments.
Regular practice with complex text and its academic vocabulary.	Texts that focus on building a strong vocabulary and understanding words that appear cross-content-areas or with multiple meanings. Students will read and build perseverance with complex text.

6th – 8th Grade Math

What's Shifting	What You May See in the Backpack
Focus	Tasks to help students understand the logic and processes of addition and subtraction, including problem solving and place value.
Coherence	Tasks that build on the foundations set in previous grades and expectations of later grade levels.
Rigor	Tasks where students will show all of their work and be able to explain their process for arriving at an answer. Students will be working on ratios and proportional reasoning, early expressions and equations, arithmetic of rational numbers, linear algebra and linear functions.

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What Every 6th – 8th Grade Parent Needs to Know about the New Illinois Learning Standards

Be sure to ask your child’s teacher how you can help reinforce classroom learning when helping your child at home. While every classroom will learn skills and knowledge through different lessons, here’s a look at some of what¹ you can expect your 6th – 8th grade students to know and do by the end of the school year.

Sixth Grade	Seventh Grade	Eighth Grade
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyzing how chapters of a book, scenes of a play, or stanzas from a poem fit into the overall structure of the piece • Gaining knowledge from materials that make extensive use of elaborate diagrams and data to convey information • Writing arguments that provide clear reasons and relevant evidence using credible sources • Reviewing and paraphrasing key ideas and multiple perspectives of a speaker • Understanding ratios and rates, and solving problems involving proportional relationships • Dividing fractions, and solving related word problems • Using positive and negative numbers together to describe quantities and understanding the ordering and absolute values of positive and negative numbers • Understanding the process of solving simple equations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citing several sources of specific evidence from a piece when offering an oral or written analysis of a book, essay, article, or play • Analyzing works of fiction to see how events advance the plot and how setting shapes the characters • Determining an author’s point of view or purpose in a nonfiction work and analyzing how the author takes a position different from other authors • Conducting research in response to a specific question by drawing on evidence from several credible literary or informational sources to support an analysis or reflection • Solving percent math problems • Adding, multiplying, and dividing positive and negative numbers, and solving related word problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyzing where materials on the same topic disagree on matters of fact, interpretation, or point of view • Learning how authors support their ideas through word choice, sentence and paragraph structure, and other methods • Analyzing the purpose of information presented in diverse media (e.g. print, TV, web) • Interpreting figures of speech (e.g. irony, puns) and developing a large vocabulary of general academic words and phrases • Understanding slope and relating linear equations in two variable to lines in the coordinate plane • Understanding functions as rules that assign a unique output number to each input number; using linear functions to model relationships • Analyzing statistical relationship by using a best-fit line (a straight line that models an association between two quantities)

1: Adapted from National PTA’s Guide to Student Success, www.pta.org