

Bar Code File Preparation, Transmission & Validation Frequently Asked Questions

2017-2018 Updates

The Department of Education requires bar code labels for all students taking the Iowa Assessments. To comply with DE guidelines, tests will only be scored if a bar code label is affixed to ALL answer documents. Additional fees and delays in scoring the order will apply if any documents do not have a bar code label when received at the scoring center.

Please submit a follow-up bar code order as needed to cover any new students, students missed in the original order, lost or damaged labels, etc. before sending in documents for scoring. Please wait until you are sure all of your students are accounted for before submitting a follow-up order. This avoids the additional cost and time required to validate multiple follow-up orders and send multiple shipments and will help order fulfillment proceed more smoothly.

Frequently Asked Questions

File Preparation

Q: What needs to go in a bar code file?

A: The bar code file template contains 32 fields of student data, data fields correspond to the columns in Excel, each data field must have a column header in the first row of the file. A few fields in the file are optional, a number of fields can be blank as a blank field has meaning in those data fields. For more detail on the data required and coding for the data fields, please refer to ITP's "Document Center" Bar Coding Information <https://itp.education.uiowa.edu/BarcodingDocs/> page. The document "Bar Code File Layout" contains field information and coding for each data field. The "Bar Code Template" file in the Document Center shows the header row, the layout of your file must match this template exactly.

Q: Is there anything new this year (2017-2018) in the barcode file layout?

A: The passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act has led to the addition of a new data field for "Military Connected Status". It is field 17 (column Q in Excel) in the bar code file, with the header "OI_FIELD_3". Military Connected Status applies to students with a parent or guardian who is serving in the National Guard, Reserves, or military active duty, regardless of deployment status, or if a parent/guardian died while on active duty within the last year.

Q: Are all of the data fields listed in the file layout required?

A: All 32 data fields are required to be in the file, as designated by the header row (row 1 of the template), but some data fields will be blank for student coding. For home-schooled students or students attending non-accredited non-public schools, only student name, date of birth, gender, and grade are required to be filled in (the other data fields can be left blank). The building name for home-schooled students should be "Home" or "Homeschool", in order for the validation program to recognize the status of those students.

Q: I'm not sure how to code some of the data fields listed in the file layout; where can I learn more about them?

A: The document “Bar Code File Layout” lists field descriptions and valid values to enter in the bar code file, and the document “Coding for Disaggregation of Scores” goes into more detail on the meaning of the data and coding. Both documents are available in the Document Center under Bar Coding Information <https://itp.education.uiowa.edu/BarcodingDocs/> on ITP’s website.

Q: I have read the “Coding for Disaggregation of Scores” document that ITP provides on its website but I still have questions about how to code some of my student information such as Homelessness or Free/Reduced Lunch. What do I do?

A: You can contact Tom Deeter at the Iowa DE at (515) 242-5616 or tom.deeter@iowa.gov. Tom cannot answer questions regarding how to use student information systems; if you need help entering or extracting data from your student information system, please contact your system’s vendor for help.

Q: How can I access the Iowa DE’s student State ID system to receive ID numbers for my students?

A: The DE has information about this on its website: <https://www.educateiowa.gov/data-reporting/state-id>. For additional assistance you can contact Becca Wemhoff at the DE (becca.wemhoff@iowa.gov or 515-281-5471).

Q: How do I create a bar code file?

A: Most districts use student information systems (e.g. JMC, PowerSchool, Infinite Campus, etc.) that have been approved by the Iowa Department of Education. These systems all have a special function built in to create files that fit the required format. The function/link will be named something similar to “Create file extract for bar codes”. If your district does not have a student information system, or if you use a SIS that is not approved by the DE, you may need to manually type or copy/paste information into an Excel file formatted with the bar code template. A file template is available in the Document Center <https://itp.education.uiowa.edu/BarcodingDocs/> of ITP’s website.

Q: I have some new students (or some students for whom I discovered errors in their information after labels were printed) – what should I do?

A: You need to create a new bar code order and submit a file to ITP containing just the students (new students and/or replacement labels) for whom you need labels. When you receive the labels you should affix them to the applicable answer documents PRIOR to mailing them in for scoring. All answer documents must have a bar code label before the order can be scored.

File Transmission

Q: How far in advance of testing should I submit my bar code file to ITP?

A: If you want to apply the labels before testing begins, we recommend you submit your file one month in advance of your test date. If you receive new students between your initial file submission and your test date, you should create a new bar code order and submit a file containing just those students.

You are also free to wait until after you've started testing and then order a full set of labels to place on documents after testing is concluded. Students can write in their personal information on test day, and then school staff can match and affix the correct labels with the correct students.

Q: Can I email my bar code file to ITP?

A: No. Bar code files contain sensitive information and email is vulnerable to interception by third parties. The Online Tools website provides a secure means for you to send your file to ITP and for ITP to provide you with file validation results. Student data files sent to ITP's email address will be deleted and ignored.

Q: Does my file need to be in a specific format?

A: Yes. Acceptable formats are an Excel spreadsheet (.xls or .xlsx), a comma-separated values (.csv) file, or a tab-delimited text (.txt) file, with one student per row. The file also must use the bar code template with 32 fields/columns with the header row at the top. If you use a student information system approved by the DE, it will have an export function that produces a .txt file with the template properly applied.

Q: When I try to submit my file, I get the error message "That is not a valid file type," but I know that it is one of the accepted file formats. Why am I receiving this error message?

A: Certain versions of Microsoft Office on Macintosh computers along with some third-party software may remove the ".xls" (Excel spreadsheet), ".csv" (comma-separated values) or ".txt" (tab-delimited text) filename extension, thereby confusing the website into thinking your file is not one of the accepted types. Simply edit the name of your file by appending the correct extension to the end of the File name and upload it again; the website should accept the submission.

Q: After I submit my file and click "Upload", I am taken back to a login screen – did you receive my file?

A: If you're asked to log in again after you click "Upload" it is likely that your work session has "timed out." This is a security feature that logs you out automatically after an hour of inactivity to protect your data in case you forget to log out. If this happens, we did not receive your file. Log back in to the website and try submitting your file again.

If your file was submitted successfully, you will see a "File upload complete" message and a new red-shaded row will appear under the "View a file" header. If you don't see a row matching this description, it is possible we did not receive your file. If you're unsure if we've received your file, please contact us.

Q: I am testing multiple grades at the same time and I have my data separated out over several files. Can I submit multiple files to the website for ITP to process?

A: Multiple file submissions increase the time required to process and introduce a higher potential for mistakes – therefore we ask that all records for a single order be gathered together in one file before being uploaded to your order. We can process only one file in each bar code order to produce bar code labels for students submitted in that order/file. If you submit several files to an order at the same time, we will do our best to determine if the files should be combined or if we should just process the most recent file submitted and ignore the others. If you create separate bar code orders at the same time, ITP will likely combine the orders and files if it seems appropriate.

Q: I am testing in a month and already have a completed bar code order, but we haven't received the labels yet. However I realized I forgot to include a grade – help!

A: Contact ITP. If the order has been processed by the printer, it is closed and you will need to start a new order. In some cases we may be able to reactivate the order and add the missing students to the file and process everything together.

Q: I am testing my high school in four weeks and my middle school one week after that. Should I submit these as separate orders?

A: No, submit them together. However, orders with very different test dates (e.g. October and February) should be separated. Orders with similar test dates (e.g. October 7th and October 14th) should be submitted together for faster processing.

File Validation

Q: I don't see FAY displayed in the PDF summary provided by ITP for my bar code order, what happened to that?

A: The Iowa DE changed their procedures and now collect FAY directly from schools' student information systems. ITP no longer validates FAY coding in the bar code file. The field still exists in the file template, and you are free to manually code FAY in your bar code file for internal reasons (it will appear on the CD), but FAY in the bar code file will not be used for reporting and ITP is no longer validating the accuracy of the information. Feel free to contact ITP if you have questions: Rob @ 319-335-5259.

Q: I received an email that said my file had errors in it. I checked the website and found that my errors were with birth dates. However the dates are correct; my students are special ed., foreign exchange students, recent immigrants, etc. How do I take care of this error?

A: Simply let ITP know that these dates are correct, either by marking the Excel error file we provide with an X in the "Correction For Field" column, or with a message via the "Contact ITP" link on the website. The dates will continue to show up as "errors" on the PDF order summary, but you don't need to do anything else with them. If you indicate a birth date is correct, but the year is way off (e.g. a student born in 2013 listed as a 3rd grader), ITP may contact you directly and request clarification.

Q: I'm receiving an error "Race (Missing)" but my student is coded Hispanic. What is going on?

A: Race/ethnicity classification involves a two-question designation. The first question: Is this student Hispanic/Latino? (yes/no) Second question: What is the student's race? (Choose one or more: American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, Black/African American, Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, White) Even if a student is Hispanic/Latino ethnicity, you must still designate a race. Multiple race designations are acceptable. Please see the document "Bar Code Procedures – Making Corrections" on our Document Center for more information on how to convey corrections for "Race (Missing)" errors.

Q: I've discovered errors with the counts in the order summary that ITP provided me. What do I do?

A: Edit the information in your student information system to correct the errors, then generate a new bar code file and upload this new file to your existing order. ITP will process the most recent information submitted.

Q: I received a message that my file validated cleanly. Now what?

A: As a final step, we need you to provide verification the order summary ITP provided for your file is accurate. The order summary is a PDF file uploaded by ITP to the file management page of your order. Please review the summary and if it looks accurate, click the "Mark summary file OK" button in the upper right section of the file management page. Within a day or so you will receive an email from ITP stating that we have forwarded your file to the printer for label processing.

Q: When will I receive my labels?

A: You should expect to receive your labels no more than 7 business days after you receive confirmation that ITP has sent your file to the printer. If 7 business days pass and you still have not received your labels, please contact us using the "Contact ITP" button in the upper right section of the file management page in your order. During the winter holidays, our printer will suspend shipments over winter break, and resume after New Year's Day, so please allow extra time for order fulfillment during that time.