



PARCC FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS *Updated – July 2013*

Background

What is PARCC?

- The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) is a group of 20 states working together to develop a common set of computer-based K–12 assessments in English language arts/Literacy and math linked to the new, more rigorous Common Core State Standards (CCSS).
- PARCC is one of two state consortia developing assessments aligned to the CCSS through the federal Race to the Top assessment grant program.

Why do states need new assessments?

- Forty-six states and the District of Columbia voluntarily adopted the Common Core State Standards in 2010 and 2011, and these states need assessments that are aligned to these higher standards.
- The new tests also are being developed in response to the longstanding concerns of educators, parents and employers who want assessments that better measure students' critical-thinking and problem-solving skills and their ability to communicate clearly.
- They will provide more meaningful, actionable and timely information for educators, parents and students.
- The PARCC assessment system will have several benefits not found in current assessment systems including benefits to ***students,*** who will have clear information about whether they are working at expected levels and are on track for postsecondary success; ***teachers,*** who will receive more timely and useful data to help inform instruction; ***parents,*** who will have clear and timely information about the progress their children are making; and ***states,*** which will have comparable results across PARCC member states and will be home to a youth population that is better prepared for success.
- The PARCC assessments will replace state tests currently used to meet the requirements of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

Which states make up PARCC?

- PARCC is made up of 20 states. Nineteen are Governing States in the consortium: Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, the District of Columbia, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, Rhode Island and Tennessee. Kentucky and Pennsylvania are Participating States. The U.S. Virgin Islands is a participating territory.
- The states in PARCC educate nearly 25 million elementary, middle and high school students and include 16 of the 19 Race to the Top winners.

How does a state participate in PARCC?

- Any state can join, as either a Governing or Participating State, by signing the PARCC Memorandum of Understanding. All states in PARCC commit to adopting the Common Core State Standards. PARCC Governing States commit to participating exclusively in PARCC and to administering the assessment system statewide during the 2014–15 school year. These states also commit to field testing the assessment system components in spring 2014.

Assessment Design

What are the benefits of the PARCC assessments?

- In ELA/literacy, many states don't assess writing and few assess critical-thinking skills. PARCC will do both.
- In math, most current assessments are fill-in-the-blank "bubble tests." PARCC will give students a chance to solve real problems. Plus, they'll not only have to solve complex problems, but show *how* they solved them.





- Many current state tests measure only lower-level skills. The new assessments are designed to measure whether students are actually on track for college or careers.
- Most current tests just require students to fill in the blanks. PARCC's computer-based assessments will be much more interactive and engaging.
- Too often, current tests fail to adequately measure the skills and knowledge of students working significantly below or beyond their grade level. PARCC assessments will.
- The new tests will create comparability among states and equity among the students who reside in them. What it means to be ready for success in college or careers shouldn't vary from state to state.

What are the components of the PARCC assessment system?

The assessments will cover English language arts (ELA)/literacy and math for grades 3–11. The system includes the following components:

- **Diagnostic assessments in reading, writing and mathematics.** These optional tests, available throughout the year, will help teachers identify students' strengths and weaknesses.
- **Mid-year assessments in ELA/literacy and mathematics.** Designed to be given mid-way through the year, these optional tests will help schools shape decisions about curriculum, instruction and professional development.
- **Performance-based assessments (PBA) in ELA/literacy and mathematics.** All students will take this summative test toward the end of the school year to show what they know.
    - In ELA/literacy, this will involve analyzing literature and a narrative writing task. Students will read texts and write several pieces to demonstrate they can read and understand sufficiently complex texts independently; write effectively when using and analyzing sources; and build and communicate knowledge by integrating, comparing and synthesizing ideas.
    - In math, students will be asked to solve problems involving the key knowledge and skills for their grade level (as identified by the CCSS), express mathematical reasoning and construct a mathematical argument, and apply concepts to solve model real-world problems.
- **End-of-year assessments (EOY) in ELA/literacy and math.** All students will take this at the end of the school year. The results will be combined with the performance-based assessment to produce a student's summative assessment score. For the end-of-year assessment, students will demonstrate their acquired skills and knowledge by answering computer-based, machine-scorable questions.
- **Speaking and listening component (ELA/literacy only).** All students participating in the PARCC assessments will demonstrate speaking and listening proficiency using this tool, which can be administered anytime during the academic year. While this is a required component of the assessment, currently PARCC does not envision combining results from this with those of the performance-based assessment or end-of-year assessment to determine a student's summative assessment score.
- Item and task prototypes that illustrate what will be included in the PBA and EOY components are available here: www.parcconline.org/samples/item-task-prototypes.
- For more on the design of the assessment system, visit this site: www.parcconline.org/parcc-assessment-design.

When will the PARCC assessments be ready?

- PARCC is on track to deliver the new tests in the 2014–15 school year.

Who is developing the PARCC assessment items?

- PARCC states have contracted with Pearson and Educational Testing Services (ETS), each working with subcontractors, to develop the assessments. Additional information about contractors is available via the PARCC website. (See www.parcconline.org/Procurement.)





Who is involved in reviewing the assessment items?

- Hundreds of K–12 and postsecondary educators, content specialists, and assessment experts from across the PARCC states are participating in thorough reviews of all items. Their priority is to evaluate whether the items are closely aligned to the Common Core; are of high quality; and are rigorous, fair and unbiased. (See www.parcconline.org/assessment-development.)

Will the PARCC high school ELA/literacy and mathematics exams be given at the end of the course or end of the grade?

- The high school ELA/literacy exams will be given at the end of the grade (for grades 9, 10 and 11).
- The high school math exams will be given at the end of the course. PARCC is creating two sequences of exams, aligned to two different math course sequences. The first is a traditional sequence of courses, including Algebra I, Geometry and Algebra II. The second is an integrated pathway of courses often titled Mathematics I, II and III. Each state can decide whether to require one set of exams for all districts, whether to allow districts to choose either the integrated or traditional sequence, or some hybrid approach.

Are sample items available?

- Sample items and tasks for math and ELA/literacy — along with a range of supplementary materials and additional resources — are available at www.parcconline.org/samples/item-task-prototypes. New samples will be added over the coming months.

Are test blueprints available?

- PARCC released assessment blueprints and accompanying materials in April 2013 for both English language arts/literacy and mathematics at all grade levels.
- These tools show how the assessments reflect and measure the Common Core at every grade level. Educators can use the blueprints, combined with other PARCC tools — including the PARCC Model Content Frameworks, assessment claims, evidence statements, sample items and performance-level descriptors — to support quality implementation of the standards.
- The blueprints are available online at www.parcconline.org/assessment-blueprints-test-specs.

Will students have opportunities to practice the tests?

- PARCC tests will mirror the kind of high-quality work students are already doing in effective classrooms. In essence, “practice” should be occurring throughout the year.
- A formal practice test, consisting of representative items for each grade level, will be available in spring 2014. PARCC also will continue to release sample items to help teachers familiarize students with the format of the assessments and technology.

Is PARCC replacing my state’s current assessments?

- The PARCC assessments are being designed to replace current state assessments for English language arts/literacy and mathematics in grades 3–11.

Scoring and Reporting

What sort of data will teachers receive based on the PARCC assessments?

- The PARCC states are working to develop detailed descriptors of student achievement at each performance level on the new tests in all grades and subjects. Policy-level descriptors were adopted in October 2012, while grade- and subject-specific content descriptors were released in April 2013 for public comment. These will provide more information about what students scoring at a given level on the tests know and can do.





How quickly will assessment data be returned to teachers?

- PARCC's goal is to have data from the performance-based assessment and end-of-year assessment returned before the end of the school year.

Will the PARCC assessments be all machine scored?

- PARCC is exploring a hybrid approach to scoring that includes scoring by both machines and humans.
- PARCC is exploring current research on the efficacy of automated scoring technology to ensure its reliability.

Will student test results on the summative assessment be broken down into components with separate scores? If so, what are these components? If not, what will the cumulative score reflect?

- In ELA/literacy, the key claims — for which PARCC will report results — include whether students can read and comprehend a range of complex texts independently, whether students can write effectively when using and/or analyzing sources, and whether students can build and present knowledge through research and the comparison and synthesis of ideas.
- In math, PARCC will report scores tied to whether students can solve grade-level/course-level problems with a focus on the content outlined in the PARCC Model Content Frameworks. Information also will be available about students' ability to demonstrate fluency in key areas and to solve problems using mathematical practices, mathematical reasoning and modeling.

How will the end-of-year (EOY) assessments and performance-based assessments (PBAs) be weighted within a student's total score?

- The PARCC score will include the results from both the PBA and EOY assessment components.
- PARCC has not determined yet how scores from the PBA and EOY assessments will be weighted but expects that both components will be significant factors. Data provided through item development research in spring 2013 and field testing in the 2013–14 school year will inform this decision.

How Will the Assessments Be Used for College and Career Readiness?

How is PARCC making College- and Career-Ready Determinations?

- PARCC intends to make College- and Career-Ready Determinations in ELA/literacy and math based on new high school tests. The PARCC College- and Career-Ready Determination policy describes the academic knowledge, skills and practices students must demonstrate in ELA/literacy and math to enter directly into credit-bearing college courses without remedial coursework.
- The PARCC Governing Board and Advisory Committee on College Readiness adopted this policy in 2012, after several months of public and stakeholder review. It is guiding the development of the PARCC high school assessments and, ultimately, will serve as a guidepost for setting performance levels and associated test scores.

Will the high school assessments be used for admission into two- and four-year institutions of higher education?

- The assessments are not intended to be used by colleges and universities in decisions about college admission. They are intended only to give students a College- and Career-Ready Determination that indicates they are academically prepared to enroll in first-year, credit-bearing courses at two- and four-year institutions and can be exempt from taking a placement test at the college or university they attend.





Will the PARCC college-ready assessment replace the college/university's current placement exam, used to determine what level of coursework students are ready for?

- Not necessarily. Colleges and universities will continue to use their existing placement tests, for example, for returning students or adult learners. The decision to use the PARCC college- and career-ready assessment ultimately rests with the states, colleges and/or universities.

Who will decide in my state whether colleges and universities will use the PARCC College- and Career-Ready Determination?

- K–12 and higher education leaders in PARCC states are working together to develop the college- and career-ready assessments to increase the likelihood higher education institutions will accept a PARCC College- and Career-Ready Determination.
- Higher education systems in each state have different governance structures, which means the decision to use this determination may lie with different postsecondary leaders in each state.

When will the college- and career-ready scores be available to use?

- The PARCC college- and career-ready test will first be administered in the 2014–15 school year. Colleges and universities are evaluating whether the College- and Career-Ready Determination can be used for placement in fall 2015 or later.

What are the consequences for students who do not earn the College- and Career-Ready Determination?

- Students who do not earn the College- and Career-Ready Determination will likely have to take placement tests when they enroll in a college or university, depending on the policies adopted by higher education systems in the PARCC states.

Does "college ready" mean readiness only for four-year institutions? What about two-year degrees, technical colleges and community colleges?

- Getting students "college ready" refers to preparing them for success in credit-bearing postsecondary education, whether at a two- or four-year college or in a technical program.
- For more information, see www.parcconline.org/CCRD.

Technology

What is the Technology Readiness Tool?

- The Technology Readiness Tool supports states and districts in their transition to next-generation assessments. This measures districts' current capacity and compares that to the technology needed to administer the new online tests.

How many computers/devices will schools need to administer the assessments online?

- The number of devices a school needs largely depends on the number of students enrolled at each tested grade, the number of students that can be tested simultaneously and the available bandwidth.
- To assist schools in planning for an adequate number of devices for PARCC assessments in 2014–15, PARCC has developed some rule-of-thumb guidance.

What kinds of computers/devices will be needed?

- PARCC has released preliminary guidance on the minimum specifications for hardware/devices so districts buying instructional technology can determine whether those devices meet the specifications for PARCC (see here and here).
- PARCC is working to keep the tests "device-neutral," so districts won't need to purchase specific devices to administer the tests and so the devices can be used throughout the school year.





- Desktops, laptops, netbooks (Windows, Mac, Chrome and Linux), tablets (iPad, Windows and Android) and thin client computers will be compatible provided they are configured to meet the established hardware, operating system and networking specifications — and are able to address the security requirements described in the Security Considerations section of the PARCC Technology Guidelines.
- More information can be found in the Technology Guidelines and Technology Guidelines FAQs.

What can PARCC states and districts do to help schools get ready to administer the tests online?

- States and districts will need to collaborate to determine the best approach for preparing to administer the tests online.
- In collaboration with the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, PARCC created the Technology Readiness Tool for states to use with districts.
- PARCC state leaders are collaborating to share ideas and best practices.
- PARCC also released a white paper that presents a variety of strategies states are taking to build technology capacity, including how states can leverage currently existing federal funding streams as well as specific state-developed strategies.

PARCC Test Administration Policies

Will retakes be allowed on PARCC?

- PARCC will make retests available to states.
- In grades 3–8, PARCC will offer one retest opportunity per year.
- In high school, PARCC will offer a maximum of three retest opportunities per year (per end-of-course assessment).
- Individual states will determine whether to offer retests and how many times per year in high school.

Will the PARCC tests be used as a graduation requirement for high school students?

- This is a state decision.

When will districts and schools know whether their states are offering the diagnostic and mid-year assessments?

- This is a state decision. If a state decides not to offer the diagnostic and mid-year assessments, these will likely still be available for districts to purchase and use.

If optional diagnostic and mid-year assessments are adopted or made available by the state, how do teachers access them?

- These components will likely be housed on the PARCC online resource center, or another platform that teachers will have access to if their state or district decides to make these available.

How will the PARCC assessments be administered in schools with block scheduling (or other "non-traditional" schedules)?

- PARCC will offer testing windows for the mathematics performance-based and end-of-year assessments that accommodate schools with block or similar non-traditional schedules. PARCC is still determining whether the English language arts/literacy can be administered during those windows.

What is PARCC policy on calculator use in the classroom?

- PARCC adopted a Calculator Policy on the use of calculators on the PARCC assessments for grades 3–5, grades 6–8 and high school. (PARCC is considering a separate policy on calculator use for students with accommodations.)





What is PARCC's guidance around the instructional use of technology?

- PARCC states know that in the 21st century students need to have access to technology in the classroom throughout the year, not just at testing time. Devices used for tests also should be used for instructional purposes.

What is the timeline for the rollout of all the resources leading up to the PARCC assessments?

- The most updated information about the PARCC timeline is available here.
- Major deadlines include:
  - Item development research in spring 2013
  - Field testing in spring 2014
  - Full-scale implementation of summative assessments in spring 2015
- PARCC also has established a timeline for the release of important information to schools and districts, which is available here.

Will all schools and districts get to participate in item development research in spring 2013? Field testing in 2013–14?

- PARCC is conducting ***item development research*** in spring-summer 2013, with 2,300 students across six PARCC states, to evaluate the quality, usability and accessibility of test items.
- ***Field testing*** will take place in the spring of 2014. All items and tasks that will appear on the PARCC summative assessments will be field tested in schools across the PARCC states.
- PARCC is in the process of specifying the requirements for field testing, as well as the identification and selection of participating schools and districts.
- PARCC will share guidance with schools and districts on field test participation in June 2013. All schools — even those not selected for field testing — will be able to use the PARCC practice test in spring 2014.

Will districts have flexibility within testing windows?

- Schools and districts will have a maximum of two four-week windows to complete the administration of the performance-based and end-of-year components (one window per component). States or districts can choose to administer the tests in a shorter time span if they have sufficient capacity to do that.

How much time will the PARCC assessments take? How does this compare with what is currently in place?

- Since testing times currently vary from state to state, some states may find an increase in testing time and others a reduction of testing time. In some places, time spent on testing will stay the same.
- Based on early research on the PARCC test items, PARCC released information about estimated testing times for each grade. These include the estimated time it will take students to complete all of the sessions of the performance-based and end-of-year components in both ELA/literacy and mathematics at each grade level. The estimated times for both components and both subject areas are as follows:
  - 8 hours on performance-based and end-of-year assessments in ELA/literacy and math annually in 3rd grade
  - Just over 9 hours to assess those subjects in grades 4–5
  - A little less than 9 ½ hours in middle school
  - A little more than 9 ½ hours in high school
- These times refer to on-task time, or the time it will take most students to complete the PARCC summative tests. While it is anticipated that most students will complete the test sessions in the estimated times, states will make a limited amount of additional time available to learners who work at slower rates.





- Of course, schools will continue to make special accommodations for children with disabilities who have specific requirements and arrangements established.

Special Student Populations

What types of accommodations will be allowed for students with disabilities for both the performance-based assessments and the end-of-year tests?

- The draft PARCC Accommodations Manual is a comprehensive policy document that will support local educators in the selection, administration and evaluation of accommodations for the assessment of students with disabilities and English learners on the PARCC end-of-year, performance-based and mid-year assessment components.
- The draft manual was released for public and stakeholder input in spring 2013, and the first edition will be finalized in summer 2013.

How will the tests be accessible to students with disabilities?

- The intent is for the PARCC assessments to be administered to all students, except those with the most significant cognitive disabilities for whom the state will administer a modified or alternate assessment. Some PARCC states are working with other consortia to develop tests for those students, and other states are working to develop their own assessments.
- PARCC is using Universal Design principles to make the new tests as accessible as possible to all students.

What is being done to assist students with disabilities that need paper and pencil assessments?

- PARCC will make paper and pencil assessments for those students that require them due to an identified need.

What opportunities do educators of students with disabilities and English learners have to provide feedback and inform the conversation?

- PARCC's Operational Working Group and Technical Working Group for Accessibility, Accommodations, and Fairness weigh in on all aspects of PARCC assessments to ensure they are widely accessible.
- PARCC also has put in place mechanisms for states to involve educators — including educators of students with disabilities and English language learners:
  - Educator Leader Cadres
  - Local Educator Item Review Committees
  - Bias and Sensitivity Review Committees
  - Public reviews of the PARCC Model Content Frameworks, tools and resources (such as draft accommodations policies and manual in early 2013)

PARCC Resources and Educator Engagement

What resources will PARCC have available for teachers, school leaders and others?

- Educator Leader Cadres (ELCs), groups of 24 educators from each PARCC state, serve as state and local leaders in helping raise awareness around the CCSS and the PARCC assessments. PARCC launched the ELCs in July 2012. ELC members use an online portal to share resources.
- PARCC released Model Content Frameworks in ELA/literacy and math in 2011 to articulate the key shifts in the CCSS to guide the assessment development. The content frameworks were opened for additional feedback from educators in June and July 2012, and updated versions were published in August 2012.
- In August 2012, PARCC also released item and task prototypes for selected grades in English language arts/literacy and mathematics. The primary purpose of sharing these is to support educators as they transition to the new standards and tests. More sample items will be released in the coming months.





- PARCC is planning to create professional development modules to help teachers and administrators get ready**.**
- The K–2 formative assessments, diagnostic assessments and mid-year performance-based assessments also will serve as excellent resources for teachers.
- PARCC also will release a significant portion of assessment items and tasks each year, along with annotated student work, to provide educators with insight into the types of questions that appear on the tests and examples of student work.

How is PARCC engaging teachers in the development process?

- As part of the test development process, PARCC states are bringing teams of educators together to review and provide feedback on test items as part of local educator review committees.
- The Educator Leader Cadres include educators from every PARCC state.

Consortium Structure and Governance

How is PARCC governed?

- The chief state school officer for each of the governing states serves on the PARCC Governing Board. The Governing Board meets quarterly to make major policy, operational, design and financial decisions regarding PARCC. The Governing Board elects a chair from among its members to serve a one-year, renewable term. Governing Board members from six of the states serve on the Executive Committee, which meets weekly.

How is PARCC funded?

- PARCC is funded through a $186 million grant through the U.S. Department of Education's Race to the Top assessment program to support the development and design of the next-generation assessment system.
- The Florida Department of Education serves as the fiscal agent for the PARCC grant and manages the grant funds. PARCC procurements can be issued through any PARCC governing state.

What is a Governing State? What is a Participating State?

- PARCC **Governing States** have committed to administer the assessment system statewide during the 2014–15 school year. These states also have committed to field testing the assessment items in spring 2014.
- States that want to participate in the design of PARCC's assessment system but are not prepared to make the level of commitment of Governing States are **Participating States.**
- Visit here for more on the PARCC states.

What is Achieve?

- Achieve is a non-profit education advocacy organization with a 15-year history of working with states to improve standards and assessments. In 2010, Achieve was selected through a competitive bidding process by PARCC as the project management partner for the consortium.

Who from the states is involved in PARCC?

- Leaders and educators from K–12 and postsecondary institutions in all PARCC states are involved.
- ***K–12:*** The chief state school officers in PARCC Governing States lead the consortium and make the major policy, design and operational decisions for PARCC. Each state also has designated a K–12 State Lead for PARCC, to help guide the day-to-day work of test development. Other state officials and local educators serve on a range of PARCC committees and item review teams.
- ***Postsecondary:*** Senior higher education officials, such as state higher education system leaders and chancellors/presidents of two- and four-year degree-granting institutions, serve on the PARCC Advisory Committee on College Readiness. Each state also has designated a state higher education lead to coordinate the day-to-day work and participate in assessment





development and state implementation activities. Higher education faculty and campus administrators also are engaged in discussions about the development of the tests, including through item review teams.

Who manages and leads the day-to-day work of PARCC? And, how is that structured?

- PARCC has formed a number of committees to help manage and lead the day-to-day work of the consortium.
- The PARCC Governing Board has authority for major policy, operational, design and financial decisions.
- The Advisory Committee on College Readiness (ACCR) works in partnership with the Governing Board to shape PARCC's strategy for working with higher education systems and institutions and K–12 leaders. ACCR is comprised of higher education leaders from PARCC states and recognized education leaders.
- **Design, Development & Implementation Committees** are responsible for leading major areas of work related to the development of the PARCC assessments and related tools.

Does PARCC have any national experts advising its work?

- The Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) advises PARCC as it develops a next-generation assessment system to ensure the assessments will provide reliable results to inform valid instructional and accountability decisions.
- PARCC **Technical Working Groups (TWGs)** are advising the consortium on specific assessment and policy issues, including accessibility, accommodations and fairness; mathematics; and English language arts/literacy.

Additional Questions

Who should I contact if I have additional questions about PARCC?

- If you have general questions about PARCC, please use the contact form on the PARCC website to submit a question: www.parcconline.org/contact. PARCC's project management partner Achieve monitors these questions and will respond directly to you or direct you to a PARCC state representative who can help answer your question.
- If you have a question regarding PARCC in your state, you also may use the PARCC state pages on the PARCC website (www.parcconline.org/parcc-states) to identify the K–12 or higher education lead for PARCC in your state so that you can contact them directly.