

Expanding Access

Accessibility Features and Accommodations for Students with Disabilities in PARCC Assessments—A Parent's Guide

In Brief

During the 2014–2015 school year, students in Grades 3 through 11 will take the new computer-based PARCC state assessments. These online assessments include tools built into the computer platform for all students and a number of accessibility features that can be provided for individual students based on need. In addition, the PARCC assessments include accommodations that students with disabilities may need. These will reduce barriers for students and help them show what they know and are able to do.

As a parent, you are involved in choosing accommodations that help your child do his or her best on classroom tests and state assessments. Because the new PARCC assessments are delivered on a computer, your child may need some new and/or different accommodations.

This brochure describes how PARCC will provide accessibility features and accommodations and discuss how parents can use the information to improve their child's participation on the new PARCC assessments (Performance-Based, Midyear, and End-of-Year) in English language arts/literacy and mathematics.

PARCC
Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers

Introduction to PARCC

The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) is a group of states—including yours—that have come together to develop high-quality student assessments aligned with the new Common Core State Standards in English language arts/literacy and mathematics. These computer-delivered assessments will replace previous state tests in those subjects.

PARCC assessments may be different from tests your child has taken in the past. For example, PARCC assessments:

- Encourage students to experience engaging, real-life texts and solve meaningful problems based on high-quality classroom work.
- Show whether students are on track for success in college or a career.
- Use a computer system that is easy for students to learn and use.
- Provide information about students' academic achievement—what they are doing well and where improvement is needed.
- Build in accessibility features that help all students do their best, and expand access for students with disabilities by providing a range of accommodations.

Many students, including those with disabilities, will participate in computer-delivered assessments for the first time. As a result, certain questions may arise: How are accessibility features and accommodations handled in the new computer-delivered PARCC assessments? How are they different from those that students with disabilities may use on paper-and-pencil tests? To answer these questions, let's take a look at the PARCC Accessibility System. [*Note*: Although PARCC will allow a student to take a paper-and-pencil version of the test if his or her Individualized Education Program (IEP) or Section 504 plan requires it, this brochure focuses on computer-delivered assessments.]

A Focus on Accessibility

Expanding student access, increasing student participation, and providing fair and equal opportunities for students to show what they know and are able to do—these are the goals of the PARCC Accessibility System and the policies that are described in the *PARCC Accessibility Features and Accommodations Manual*. How are the PARCC assessments more accessible?

From the beginning, PARCC used the ideas of universal design to build its assessments. Universal design began in the field of architecture to design the world in a way that benefits a diverse group of people. For example, architects plan structures to be more accessible before they are built—ramps, curb cuts, braille elevator buttons, etc.—so more people can have access to their environment.

In the PARCC assessments, all students can use accessibility features that help them show what they know and are able to do. However, in the PARCC Accessibility System (see graphic on page 2), different levels of support are built into the PARCC assessments that make it so that more students can participate equitably. Let's take a closer look at each level of support.

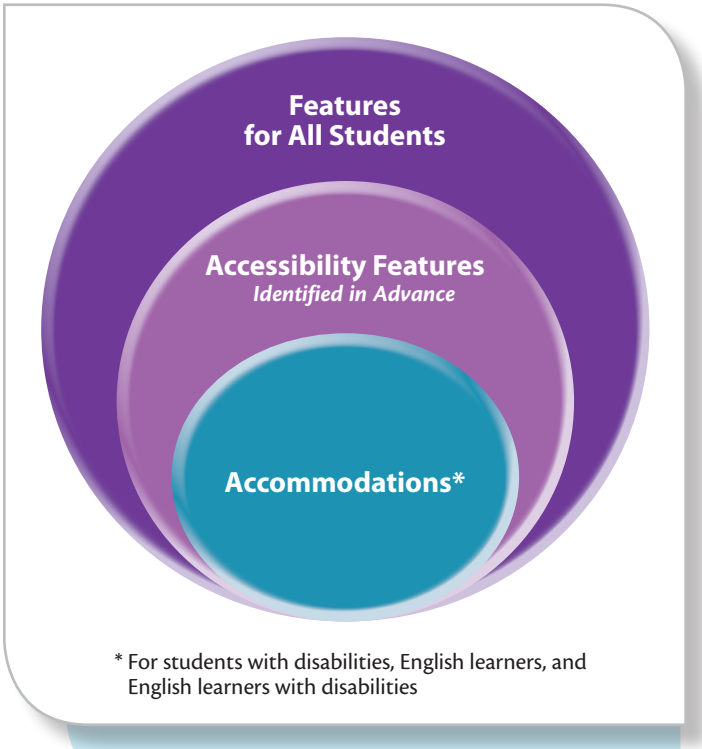


Features for All Students

PARCC accessibility features provide a range of tools, supports, and preferences that all students can use on the test. They are embedded in the delivery platform or test administration and are typical of features already used by students on their computers in classrooms and at home. Examples include:

- Using a highlighter tool to shade text on the screen, which helps students recall information later.
- Having test directions read aloud and repeated as needed.
- Enlarging text on the computer screen to see words, pictures, and details more clearly.
- Using a pop-up glossary (i.e., students hold their cursor over a word and its definition appears).
- Using a spell checker as they write.
- Writing and editing notes on an on screen notepad.
- Using writing tools, such as copy, cut, paste, bold, and underline.
- Flagging items that they want to come back to later.
- Raising and lowering the volume—called audio amplification—on their headphones during the test.
- Crossing out answers for multiple choice items.

Other features that are not embedded in the computer platform include: allowing students to use headphones or noise buffers to filter external noise, redirecting the student's attention to the test, providing blank paper for the student to plan and organize responses, and clarifying general administration questions.



The PARCC Accessibility System

Accessibility Features Identified in Advance

Additional features also are available to all students based on their individual needs. Because having too many features on the screen at the same time may confuse or distract some students, an adult must identify them in advance for a particular student. These features are written in students' IEPs, Section 504 plans, or listed on a sheet that shows what the students need on the PARCC assessments. Students do not have to use the features. Examples include:

- Masking, which allows students to cover answer options.
- Adjusting the color contrast of the background or print.
- Using the line reader tool to move text up and down.
- Using text-to-speech for the mathematics assessments, which allows students to hear the test read aloud.

In addition, PARCC provides administrative considerations for all students. Principals have the authority to schedule students in other testing spaces and at different scheduled times, as long as all formal PARCC requirements are met. Examples of administrative considerations for all students include: testing in a small group, allowing frequent supervised breaks, taking the test at a different time of day, testing in a separate or alternate location, testing in a specified area or seating, and using adaptive and specialized equipment or furniture.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Because a student's disability may affect how well he or she does on the test, accommodations can be used to overcome or cancel the effects of the disability. Accommodations can level the playing field, but they should not reduce the expectation that the student will reach the same level of achievement as other students.

Accommodations are selected by a student's IEP or Section 504 team. They change either the test setting, the way the student answers the questions, the way in which the test is given to a student, or when the test is scheduled. They increase the probability that the student will receive an accurate score based on his or her knowledge and skills.

Students should be able to practice using the accommodations they need during classroom activities before the PARCC assessments are given. Accommodations provided on the PARCC assessments should be generally the same as those provided for classroom assessments. However, some classroom accommodations may not be permissible for the PARCC assessments if their use would change what the test item is measuring and result in an invalid score. Examples of PARCC assessment accommodations are shown in the text box, Accommodations for the Computer-Delivered PARCC Assessments.

Parents' Role

Parents are key members of the IEP team that selects accommodations for their child. In cases where parents participate in their child's Section 504 plan, they also may help to choose accommodations. PARCC has written the *PARCC Accessibility Features and Accommodations Manual* to support educators and parents in making decisions about what a student will need to participate fully in the PARCC assessments.

Accommodations for the Computer-Delivered PARCC Assessments



The *PARCC Accessibility Features and Accommodations Manual* lists all of the accommodations that IEP or Section 504 teams may choose to give students with disabilities based on their learning needs. Examples follow. [*Note*: To ensure that the accommodation results in a valid score, the *PARCC Accessibility Features and Accommodations Manual* provides additional guidance that IEP and Section 504 teams should consider when selecting certain accommodations for an individual student. In the following discussion, those accommodations are noted with an*.]

Presentation Accommodations

Presentation accommodations change how the test is given. Examples of presentation accommodations include:

- Use of assistive technology, such as an adapted keyboard, mouse, or computer screen. [*Note*: PARCC assessments allow for a wide range of assistive technology to support individual student needs. Guidelines will be available in Fall 2013.]
- Braille edition of the tests. This may be a hard copy of the English language arts/literacy (ELA/L) and mathematics assessments, or a refreshable braille display for ELA/L.
- Closed-captioning of multimedia passages in the ELA/L.
- Descriptive video (narrated audio description of key visual elements on the ELA/L).
- Paper-and-pencil edition of the test for a student who cannot use a computer to take the test. [*Note*: The *PARCC Accessibility Features and Accommodations Manual* contains a list of accommodations for students who use the paper-and-pencil edition.]
- Tactile graphics for students who read braille.
- Video of an interpreter using American Sign Language (ASL) for the mathematics assessments and/or the test directions. [*Note*: If the student does not use ASL, an interpreter and a separate setting are an option.]
- Text-to-speech for the ELA/L assessments, including items, response options, and passages.*

Response Accommodations

Response accommodations give students a different way to answer test questions. Examples of response accommodations include:

- Assistive technology. [Note: PARCC assessments allow for a wide range of assistive technology to support individual student needs. Guidelines will be available in Fall 2013.]
- Braille note taker. [*Note*: An electronic braille note taker can be used as a word processor; however, the grammar checker tool, Internet, and stored file features must be turned off.]
- Scribing or speech-to-text (e.g., dictating/transcribing) for the ELA/L and mathematics assessments. Examples include: dictating responses using speech-to-text software that is embedded in the assessments; using an augmentative/assistive communication device (e.g., picture word board); and signing, gesturing, pointing, or eye gazing.*
- Calculation device for the noncalculation sections of the mathematics assessments.*
- Word prediction on the ELA/L performance-based assessments.*

Timing and Scheduling Accommodations

Timing and scheduling accommodations are changes in the amount of time a student has to complete the assessment, when the test is given during the day, and whether a student may take breaks as needed. An example of a timing and scheduling accommodation is being given extended time, but not more than one school day, to finish each test section.

Unique Accommodations

While the PARCC accessibility features and accommodations are comprehensive, it is possible that a student may require an additional accommodation that is not listed. In that case, the school will need to review the formal approval procedure in the state.

For a more thorough discussion, see Section 3: Accommodations for Students with Disabilities in the *PARCC Accessibility Features and Accommodations Manual*.

What Parents Can Do to Support Their Child

- Familiarize yourself with the Common Core State Standards. Talk to your child's teachers about what he or she is learning.
- Learn about the PARCC assessments—their purpose, what they measure, and how the results will be used.
- Learn about PARCC accessibility features and accommodations. Identify those that your child may need or find helpful to use at home, in the classroom, and on the PARCC assessments.
- Find out how your child's teachers are preparing for the new assessments and how they are helping your child get ready.
- Talk to your child about the accommodations he or she already uses on tests. Discuss whether or not your child thinks they are helping him or her. Share this information with your child's teachers—or encourage your child to share his or her ideas with teachers.
- Share information about your child's strengths and needs related to using computers for work assignments with educators. Include information about the types of strategies your child uses routinely to complete homework assignments and other tasks in the home and the community.



Accessibility features and accommodations allow more students to participate in the PARCC assessments.

- Encourage your child to use the accessibility features and/or accommodations identified in his or her IEP or Section 504 plan at home, if possible.
- Ask about the technology your child will be using for the PARCC assessments. Ask about how your child can practice using the technology during school.
- Make sure your child is willing to use the accommodation(s) and/or accessibility feature(s). Inform his or her teacher if your child is having difficulty using an accommodation.
- Research possible state and/or regional technology centers for information on matching student needs with allowable assistive technology.

Find Out More

Visit the PARCC website (**www.parcconline.org**) for more information and resources, including:

- *PARCC Accessibility Features and Accommodations Manual* (**http://www.parcconline.org/parcc-assessment-policies**).
- *PARCC: A New Vision of Assessment* (**http://www.parcconline.org/about-parcc**). This PowerPoint presentation provides an overview of the PARCC assessments and describes advantages of the new PARCC system.
- PARCC assessment sample items (**http://www.parcconline.org/samples/item-task-prototypes**).
- PARCC blueprints (**http://www.parcconline.org/assessment-blueprints-test-specs**). PARCC has released a set of test information documents, including assessment blueprints and evidence statement tables, to help parents better understand the design of the PARCC assessments.
- PARCC performance level descriptors (**http://www.parcconline.org/CCRD**). These describe what your child will be expected to know and be able to do.
- Common Core State Standards (**http://www.corestandards.org/**).

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For more information, visit the PARCC website:
www.parcconline.org

About PARCC: PARCC is an alliance of states working together to develop common assessments serving approximately 20 million students. PARCC is led by its member states and managed by Achieve, Inc. PARCC's ultimate goal is to make sure all students graduate from high school college- and career-ready.

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