

Expanding Access

Accessibility Features and Accommodations for English Learners 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. The PARCC assessments also include accommodations that English learners may need to show what they know and are able to do.

Your child already may be receiving accommodations 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 discusses 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.

[*Note*: Although some English learners also may have a disability that entitles them to additional accommodations, this brochure focuses only on accessibility as it relates to English learners.]

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 assessments in those subjects.

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

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

Many students, including English learners, will participate in computer-delivered assessments for the first time. Let's take a look at how accessibility features and accommodations will be handled in the new computer-delivered PARCC assessments for English learners.

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. These goals and accompanying policies are described in the *PARCC Accessibility Features and Accommodations Manual*.

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 is accessible to 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 to allow more students to participate equitably. Let's take a closer look at each level of support.

PARCC
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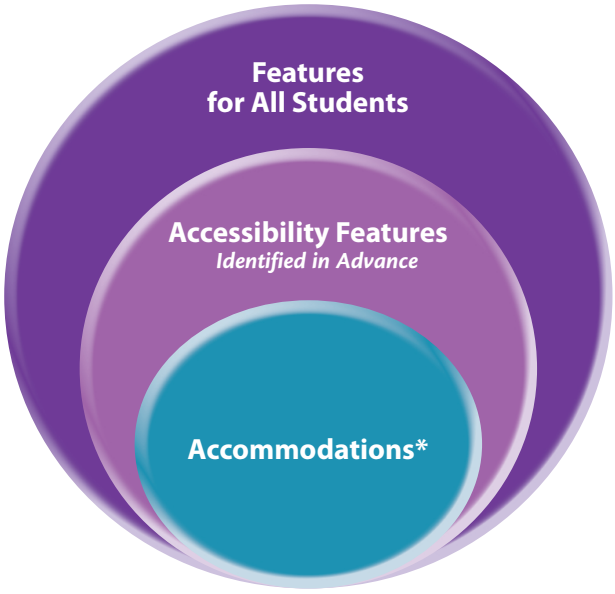


Features for All Students

PARCC accessibility features provide a range of tools, supports, and preferences that all students can use on the assessment. They are embedded in the delivery platform 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 assessment directions read aloud and repeated.
- 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, etc.
- Flagging items that they want to come back to later.
- Raising and lowering the volume on their headphones.
- Crossing out answers for multiple choice items.

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



* For students with disabilities, English learners, and English learners with disabilities

The PARCC Accessibility System

To further increase access for all students—including English learners—PARCC provided assessment developers with guidelines for writing items that are bias free, sensitive to diverse cultures, stated clearly, of appropriate linguistic complexity, and consistently formatted. As such, PARCC assessment items allow eligible students to respond to the assessment items without the need for accommodations, if possible.

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 the features in advance for a particular student. These features are written in students' English learner plans or listed on a sheet that shows what the students need on the PARCC assessments. Students are not required 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 assessment 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 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 assessment 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 English Learners

Although the PARCC assessments are quite accessible, some English learners also may need accommodations to access the assessment content and demonstrate their knowledge and skills. Accommodations for English learners either change some of the assessment conditions or the language in which the assessment is given.

Accommodations should not reduce the expectation that a student will reach the same level of achievement as other students. Providing this support increases the probability that a student will receive an accurate score based on his or her knowledge and skills, because the content of the assessment does not change.

Accommodations are chosen by educators who are familiar with the student. Students should practice using the accommodations they need during classroom activities before the PARCC assessments are given. Accommodations for the PARCC assessments should be generally the same as those for classroom tests. However, some classroom accommodations may not be allowed for the PARCC assessments if they would change what the item is measuring.

English Learner Accommodations for the Computer-Delivered PARCC Assessments



The *PARCC Accessibility Features and Accommodations Manual* lists all of the accommodations that educators and English learner planning teams may choose to give English learners based on their learning needs. Examples follow.

Extended time. The student is given more time to complete testing. A maximum of up to one school day is allowed to complete one assessment session during the prescribed testing window. Students who use this accommodation must have a quiet location in which to complete the assessment. This accommodation is highly recommended for English learners at the beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels.

General administration directions clarified in student's native language (by the assessment administrator).The assessment administrator clarifies only general administration instructions. Students should be given enough time to process directions and ask clarifying questions. Students must be tested in a separate setting with other students needing the same accommodation to minimize distractions. This accommodation is highly recommended for English learners at the beginning level and recommended for English learners at the intermediate level, but may not be appropriate for English learners at the advanced level.

General administration directions read aloud and repeated as needed in student's native language (by the assessment administrator). The assessment administrator reads aloud, and repeats as needed, assessment directions in the student's native language. Students should be given enough time to process directions and ask clarifying questions. Students must be tested in a separate setting with other students needing the same accommodation to minimize distractions. This accommodation is highly recommended for English learners at the beginning level and recommended for English learners at the intermediate level, but may not be appropriate for English learners at the advanced level.

Scribe or speech-to-text: Responses dictated for mathematics assessment in English. Students dictate responses to mathematics assessment items either to a human scribe or through speech-to-text technology. Students must be tested in a separate setting. This accommodation is highly recommended for English learners at the beginning level and recommended for English learners at the intermediate level, but may not be appropriate for English learners at the advanced level.

Word-to-word dictionary (English/native language). Students use a bilingual, word-to-word dictionary or electronic translator. Dictionaries that include definitions or pictures are not allowed. Students should be familiar with the dictionary they will use on the assessment. Students should be given enough time to complete the assessment using the accommodation. This accommodation may not be appropriate for English learners at the beginning level, but is highly recommended for English learners at the intermediate and advanced levels.

For a more thorough discussion, see Section 4: Accommodations for English Learners in the *PARCC Accessibility Features and Accommodations Manual*.

Note: In the coming months. PARCC plans to release a policy for translation which may result in some accommodation changes for English learners.

Examples of PARCC assessment accommodations for English learners are shown in the text box, English Learner Accommodations for the Computer-Delivered PARCC Assessments. English learners who also have a disability are allowed to receive accommodations for students with disabilities. These are chosen by their individualized education program (IEP) or Section 504 team. For more information on accommodations for English learners with disabilities, see the *PARCC Accessibility Features and Accommodations Manual*, and the brochure, *Expanding Access: Accessibility Features and Accommodations for Students with Disabilities in PARCC Assessments—A Parent's Guide.*

As students learn English, they will need fewer accommodations. PARCC has provided guidance for choosing accommodations for students at beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels of English language proficiency.

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.
- Talk to your child's teachers about his or her English language proficiency and how it is being measured.
- 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. Discuss with your child's teachers how English proficiency is being addressed in the PARCC assessments.
- Talk to your child about the accommodations he or she already uses on classroom tests. Discuss whether or not your child thinks they are helping. Share this information with your child's teachers.
- Share information with educators about your child's strengths and needs related to using computers for work assignments. Include information about the types of strategies your child uses routinely to complete homework assignments and other tasks in the home and the community.
- Encourage your child to use the accessibility features and/or accommodations identified for him or her at home.
- 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.



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

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-accessibility-features-and-accommodations-manual**).
- *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 Frequently Asked Questions (**http://www.parcconline.org/sites/parcc/files/PARCCFAQ_8-12-13.pdf**).
- 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.
- *Expanding Access: Accessibility Features and Accommodations for Students with Disabilities in PARCC Assessments—A Parent's Guide* (**http://www.parcconline.org/parcc-accessibility-features-and-accommodations-manual)**.

In addition, you may find these other resources helpful:

- Common Core State Standards (**http://www.corestandards.org**).
- English Language Proficiency Assessment for the 21st Century Consortium (**http://www.k12center.org/rsc/pdf/elpa21_consortium.pdf**). The purpose of the Consortium is to enhance the quality of assessments used by states for measuring students' English language proficiency, development, and progress by developing assessment instruments that align with the Common Core State Standards.

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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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