



Ten Things to Know About PARCC

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Here are 10 things you should know about the PARCC assessments as you start off this school year:

1. PARCC is your state's homegrown assessment. PARCC is not a testing company – it's a group of states working together to build better assessments. Your state's educators and state education leaders actively participated in the design, field testing, and implementation of the new assessments. Your state's education commissioner or superintendent is one of the PARCC Governing Board members making the decisions about the PARCC assessments. Your state is not buying a test from a vendor. Your state is in charge of your state's tests.

2. The field test last spring was very successful, and provided lessons for the first full administration next spring. More than a million students at 16,000 schools in 14 states plus the District of Columbia took the field test this past spring and with the exception of some minor glitches, as we anticipated, the tryout was a huge success. We have received lots of feedback from teachers, coordinators, students and others. We are compiling the survey results and making adjustments. For example: we are making the test manuals more concise and we are working to improve the equation editor that students use to build equations for the math tests. Student feedback was generally positive. As one student said: "I like this test so much more than [the state test] because it makes you think."

We've been sharing results from the surveys in our newsletter updates [here](#) [1], [here](#) [2], [here](#) [3] and [here](#) [4]. We will release a full report in September with more details. We will also be sharing some research studies later this fall. Stay tuned.

3. Paper-based tests are available for schools that are not yet ready for the technology. The goal is for all students to benefit from computer-enhanced features. Though the majority of schools will be using the computer-based version, paper forms are available for schools that need them. However, computer-based assessments provide a faster turn-around of results to give teachers information they can use, and give students engaging real world features.

Part of our field testing research, which will be completed late this fall, looks at whether results can be compared between students who take the tests on laptop vs. tablet, desktop or paper-and-pencil.

4. Teachers in your state are playing an important role in developing the assessments. Ask around – some of your colleagues have been involved in the development of the PARCC

assessments, contributing to the design, reviewing test items, and reviewing reading passages.

5. We've updated the test design. We announced a couple of weeks ago that through a review, experts from our states determined that it's possible to measure all of the standards with [fewer text passages and fewer test items](#) ^[5]. In the lower grades (3-5) that means a drop from four text passage sets to two and from 26 test items to 13. In grades 6-11, there will be four passage sets and 22 test items, down from five passage sets and 26 items.

It's too early to say how that will affect the total test time – experts from your states are continuing to review information from the field test about how long it took most students to complete the tests and will make a policy decision about how long to make the test. Remember: the goal is to give kids enough time to show what they know, based on what they need to stay on track for success in future grades and in college and careers. And unlike past tests, these are composed of productive learning tasks – making much better use of test time than in the past.

The PARCC states will tell school districts in September how much time to allot to testing, so they can begin the work of scheduling all students for the assessments next spring.

6. Scheduling help is on the way. Speaking of scheduling, principals will be invited soon to a webinar later this month that will provide technical assistance on scheduling. There's no doubt that it's more complicated when every student needs access to a computer or other test-taking device during a set window of time. We can't make it a breeze, but we can certainly help make it less mystifying. Watch for announcements in the newsletter.

7. Watch for resources for parents, teachers, principals. This month, we'll be releasing a toolkit of resources that principals and other instructional leaders can share with teachers and parents, and a few just for themselves. We'll announce the release in this newsletter.

8. Try out these professional learning opportunities. The PARCC states just completed work on the first two of five [online learning modules](#) ^[6] for educators. They include an overview of the assessment system, and a primer on the accommodations and accessibility features in the test, and guidelines for students with disabilities and English learners. Three more – explaining the mid-Year assessment, the computer-adaptive diagnostic assessments, and the speaking and listening assessments – are all in progress.

9. Diagnostic tools are on the way. Some of the most exciting elements of the PARCC assessment are still to come. Teachers in your states are helping shape the development of several key tools, including:

- Diagnostic assessments – computer-adaptive and flexible indicators of student knowledge that teachers can use from Day One of school, if they want, to get a deep look at their students' understanding of particular topics. These are optional tools – but tools that teachers routinely tell us they can't wait to see.

- Mid-year assessments –comprised of performance-based items and tasks, with an emphasis on hard-to-measure standards.

- Speaking and listening assessments – which indicate a student’s ability to communicate his or her own ideas, listen and comprehend the ideas of others, and to integrate and evaluate information from multimedia sources.

Together, these create an assessment *system* – high quality assessments aligned to high quality standards. They allow teachers to inform their instruction throughout the year, making the most of their time with students.

10. The best technology? Any device that teachers and students are familiar with. Our recommendation to districts and schools is to purchase devices based on instructional needs as a first consideration. Findings from the initial device studies and the field test have shown that students will have a better test-taking experience when they have been provided the opportunity to interact and become familiar with these devices through classroom instruction.

The feedback from the field has been that all the allowable device types documented in the [PARCC tech guidelines](#) [7] functioned equally well with the TestNav system (the delivery platform for PARCC). Laptops, tablets, Chromebooks and PCs all performed equally for test delivery.

When it comes to browsers, Firefox and Chrome had fewer interruptions than Internet Explorer, though those issues were not unmanageable and PARCC will still support that browser, too.

When all is said and done, the biggest success factors were how devices and internet connectivity were managed at the school level, and how familiar school personnel were with the devices and the network behaviors.

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Links:

[1] <http://www.parcconline.org/digging-survey-results>

[2] <http://www.parcconline.org/lessons-learned-part-2-digging-survey-results>

[3] <http://www.parcconline.org/lessons-learned-part-3-technology>

[4] <https://www.parcconline.org/lessons-learned-part-4-online-training-modules-and-student-tutorials>

[5] <http://www.parcconline.org/parcc-states-reduce-no-items-elaliteracy-portion-test>

[6] <http://www.parcconline.org/professional-learning-modules-parcc-assessments>

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