



20 Facts Parents Need To Know About PARCC

How Did We Get Here?

1. New Jersey has had state assessments for decades, and the federal government has required every state to test 95% of their students in grades 3 to 8 since the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.
2. The New Jersey State Board of Education adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in 2010 and the state needed a new state assessment to test the new standards.
3. PARCC, the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, is a group of 12 states (plus DC) collaborating on a common set of K–12 assessments that cover the CCSS and the skills students need to be successful in college and life.
4. A number of organizations are supporting New Jersey's efforts to implement effective assessments that are aligned with New Jersey's higher educational standards including the New Jersey PTA, and organizations representing principals (NJPSA), superintendents (NJASA), school boards (NJSBA), higher education (NJ Council of County Colleges), and business (NJ Chamber of Commerce).

Why is PARCC Beneficial?

5. PARCC is aligned to the Common Core State Standards in language arts and math and measures how well students can apply their knowledge of concepts rather than memorizing facts. Many New Jersey educators joined hundreds of K–12 and postsecondary educators, content specialists, and assessment experts from across the country to create, review and approve every test item.
6. The computer-based PARCC tests are replacing the former paper-and-pencil-based NJ ASK and HSPA exams, and will test more students and grade levels than the previous assessments (Grades 3-8 in language arts and math and end-of-course exams in language arts grades 9, 10 and 11 and Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II).
7. Computer-based assessments are becoming common for today's students with the GED test now computer-based, and the SAT college-entrance exams soon becoming computer-based.
8. The selling of student data was never allowed under the previous tests in New Jersey, and it is not allowed under the PARCC tests. Protections are in place at both the state and federal levels, and through all contracts and agreements, intended to prevent student-identifiable data from being marketed or distributed.
9. PARCC empowers parents by providing informative feedback through the PARCC parent report on whether their children are on track to be properly prepared for college and careers, and provides schools with meaningful data to help improve classroom instruction and raise student performance.
10. A full 70% of students entering New Jersey's county colleges can't begin their college career unless they pay for remediation classes to learn what they should have learned in high school, and many surveys repeatedly find that business leaders feel high school graduates are not

properly prepared for the workforce. The data from the PARCC assessments is designed to help address these issues.

11. Many New Jersey colleges have agreed to accept the College- and Career-Ready Determinations from the PARCC assessment in math and language arts based on new high school tests. This means that students who pass the high school level PARCC tests can enter directly into credit-bearing college courses without remedial coursework.

Are Parents or Students Required to Take PARCC?

12. Neither federal nor state law provides parents with an option regarding participation in the tests. School districts apply their local policies on how they will work with parents and students to address instances where students attend school on test day but refuse to participate in the tests.

What Does PARCC Mean for Students and for Teachers?

13. For students in New Jersey, PARCC is not a "high-stakes" test. The state does not require passing PARCC to advance from one grade to the next.
14. With PARCC, teachers really can't "teach to the test" since it is designed for students to demonstrate their understanding of a concept, versus choosing a multiple-choice or true/false answer or reciting facts from memorization, as was common under previous assessments.
15. For less than 20 percent of teachers who meet specific criteria (such as grades/subjects taught, number of students and time in class, etc.), state law requires a portion of annual evaluations to be based on student growth on state assessments. For 2014-15, PARCC results will count for 10% of those evaluations for educators who meet all criteria.

How Much Time Will PARCC Take?

16. The PARCC tests account for only about 10 hours of a 1,200-hour school year, with most testing done during the school year being the result of decisions made at the local level.
17. PARCC assessments will have two different testing administration windows in the spring, but local districts have the ability to work their schedules as they see fit.

Are We Ready?

18. In the spring of 2014 over 80% of school districts and charter schools across New Jersey, encompassing about 15% of the total students in our public schools, volunteered to take part in field testing for the new PARCC assessments. Results from the field test provided quality experience for addressing device readiness and potential PARCC administration issues.
19. The Department has continuously worked with school districts for over two years, through surveys, information sessions, and site-visits, to ensure schools are tech-ready for the administration in the spring of 2015. In fact, schools have requested computer-based tests for 98% of students, indicating that the vast majority of schools are ready for the administration.
20. Since problems during testing happen each year for a variety of reasons, every school and school district has a test coordinator who is trained to respond to a variety of irregularities that may transpire during test administration. Each irregularity will be handled on a case-by-case basis by the local district, the state education department or the testing vendor.

Parent PARCC Questions Answered

What follows is a series of frequently asked questions about PARCC, the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers. The New Jersey Department of Education wants the public to have access to factual information about our state's new tests. The Department will update this section as needed to reflect any additional questions that may arise.



What is PARCC?

The new PARCC assessments are the most advanced tool that New Jersey has ever had to measure student performance. PARCC is designed to empower parents by providing informative feedback on whether their children are on track to be properly prepared for college and careers. Moreover, the new assessments will – for the first time ever – provide schools with meaningful data to help improve classroom instruction and raise student performance.

PARCC is a group of states that worked together to develop a set of assessments with the shared goal of finding a more effective approach to measure student achievement under the new academic standards in mathematics and English language arts. These new standards, known as the Common Core State Standards, were adopted in 2010 by the New Jersey State Board of Education after a thorough process that involved public participation, as well as advice and input from all sectors of New Jersey's education and business communities.

Hundreds of K–12 and postsecondary educators, content specialists, and assessment experts from across the PARCC states participated in the development of all PARCC testing items. PARCC will cover grades 3-8 in mathematics and English language arts (ELA) and end-of-course exams in ELA grades 9, 10 and 11 and Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II.

What is the history of assessments in New Jersey?

New Jersey has had state assessments for decades, going back to the 1970s. In addition, the federal government has *required* every state to test 95% of their students in grades 3 to 8 since the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*. Since states are required to test students, New Jersey has taken a leading role in making a commitment to strengthen student knowledge and skills and ensure that the state tests will provide important data to parents and teachers.

How is PARCC different from previous assessments?

The computer-based PARCC tests are replacing the former paper-and-pencil-based NJ ASK and HSPA exams. PARCC assessments will have multiple administrations, and will test more students and grade levels than the previous assessments. They are aligned to the Common Core State Standards and were created to measure how well students can apply their knowledge of concepts rather than memorizing facts. For instance, PARCC assessments require students to solve problems using mathematical reasoning and to be able to model mathematical principals.

The primary complaint educators had with New Jersey's previous paper-and-pencil test, the NJASK, is that it didn't provide useful data to improve instruction. PARCC assessments are designed to provide parents and teachers with a far greater level of informative and useful data to help improve student instruction.

Are students required to take the test?

The Department encourages educators and parents to consider the positive reasons that students should take the PARCC exams. Throughout a child's educational career, the PARCC assessments will provide parents with crucial information about their child's progress toward meeting the goal of being prepared for college and career. For the school district, teachers and administrators can use the data derived from the tests to pinpoint areas of difficulty and adjust instruction accordingly.

Annual statewide assessments are not new and the state's guidance and requirements regarding student participation has not changed. Historically, neither federal nor state law provides parents with an option regarding participation in the tests. The federal government requires 95% of students to be tested annually in grades 3 to 8. Schools that don't meet the standard could face implementation of a corrective action plan and possibly risk loss of federal funding.

Local districts apply their local policies on how they will work with parents and students to address instances where students attend school on test day but refuse to participate in the tests.

What other organizations are supporting efforts to move toward the new assessments?

A number of organizations are supporting New Jersey's efforts to implement effective assessments that are aligned with New Jersey's higher educational standards. Some of these organizations include the New Jersey PTA, and organizations representing

principals (NJPSA), superintendents (NJASA), school boards (NJSBA), higher education (NJ Council of County Colleges), and business (NJ Chamber of Commerce).

Is there too much testing?

The state requires that students be tested annually. The PARCC tests account for about 10 hours of a 1,200-hour school year. Most testing done during the school year is the result of decisions made at the local level. School districts may decide to purchase commercial, standardized tests to give to their students. In addition, local schools may require students to take any number of midterms, finals, tests and quizzes. Local school leaders continuously review their entire assessment package to make sure it provides the best feedback possible. Now that the PARCC tests will be administered, some districts may decide to rely on PARCC instead of the other assessments to provide that feedback.

A Study Commission on Student Testing was formed in 2014 and charged with reviewing and providing recommendations about the volume, frequency and impact of student assessments occurring throughout New Jersey school districts, including those administered for college admission, college credit and college pathways.

How long is the PARCC test?

The pencil-and-paper NJ ASK was given to students in grades 3-8, and the pencil-and-paper HSPA exam was given to high school students in grade 11. The computer-based PARCC will have multiple administrations and test more students and grade levels than the previous assessments.

Testing time for the NJASK ranged from about five hours in grade 3, to about six hours in grade 8. Schools administered the assessment over several days during one testing period. The PARCC assessment will be administered during two separate testing windows during the school year, around March and May. The *estimated* time for the PARCC assessment – the time that at least half of students are expected to complete the test – is 6.5 hours in grade 3, and 7.5 hours in grades 6-11. However, students who need more time will be allowed as much as 9.75 hours in grade 3, to 11 hours in grades 6-11 in *allotted* time.

How does my child benefit from taking the PARCC tests?

PARCC tests are designed to more thoroughly measure students' understanding of English language arts and mathematics than previous tests did. An individual report will be created for each student who takes the PARCC exam. That report will provide details on how each student performed on specific test items, which will tell parents and school officials about each student's strengths and weaknesses, and whether he or she needs any special assistance or class placement.

This is a critical issue for business and higher education. A full 70% of students entering New Jersey's county colleges can't begin their college career unless they pay for remediation classes to learn what they should have learned in high school. In addition, many surveys repeatedly find that business leaders feel high school graduates are not properly prepared for the workforce. The data from the PARCC assessments is designed to help address these issues.

Is the technology of PARCC too complex for students?

Computer-based assessments are becoming common for today's students. For instance, the GED test is now computer-based and the SAT college-entrance exams will also be computer-based. Some states have had all-electronic assessments for years. In addition, districts have incorporated computer literacy into their curriculum. Recognizing that some students or educators may not be comfortable with a computer-based assessment, schools can offer tutorials to students so that they can become familiar with the technology they will be using on the days of the exam.

Will PARCC sell personal information about students?

No. Protections are in place at both the state and federal levels, and through all contracts and agreements, intended to prevent student-identifiable data from being marketed or distributed. The selling of student data was never allowed under the previous tests in New Jersey, and it is not allowed under the PARCC tests.

What is the state's response to concerns about teaching to the test?

PARCC is designed for students to demonstrate their understanding of a concept, not simply choosing a multiple-choice or a true/false answer or reciting facts from memorization, as was common under previous assessments. As such, teachers really can't "teach to the test." If students understand the concepts, they should do well on the test.