

Year Three of PARCC... Frequently Asked Questions

In the 2014-15 school year, over 800,000 students in New Jersey took the PARCC assessment for the first time. This more sophisticated test was designed to provide schools with information to improve classroom instruction, and give parents valuable feedback about their child's progress. Below are frequently asked questions about PARCC, the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers.

The information below provides answers to frequently asked questions, and additional information and resources can be found on the Assessments section of the NJDOE website.

Why is New Jersey using PARCC?

New Jersey has had statewide assessments since the 1970s. In fact, the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 requires every state to test students in grades 3 to 8.

The previous paper-and-pencil student assessments – the NJASK and HSPA – complied with the federal requirement for statewide exams, but were often criticized for not providing useful data to improve schools. In the 2014-15 school year, New Jersey transitioned to PARCC, an exam created by New Jersey and other states to more accurately measure academic standards in mathematics and English language arts. PARCC is designed to provide parents and educators with information that can improve learning.

What are the advantages of the PARCC assessments?

PARCC assessments are designed to provide a number of advantages, such as:

- **A more thorough academic measurement tool.** While previous assessments commonly relied on students to answer multiple-choice or true/false answers based on rote memorization, PARCC is created to focus on age-appropriate problem-solving, critical evaluations and higher-order thinking skills – the kinds of skills students need to succeed in school and in the workplace.
- **Keeps parents informed.** PARCC will provide parents with far more comprehensive feedback on their child's academic progress. (See question immediately below for more information.)
- **Improved instruction.** Schools will receive more comprehensive data that can help improve overall classroom instruction and can be used to develop personalized support for individual students.
- **Less testing.** Previous statewide assessments informed schools if a student was struggling in a tested subject, but didn't identify where the child was struggling, which often led to additional testing. The detailed information from the PARCC assessments may decrease the need for additional testing.
- **Benefits from technology.** Most students take the PARCC exams on computer, which is becoming common among other tests (for instance, the GED test is now computer based and the SAT college-entrance exams will be). Schools will benefit because, as the test progresses, results will be returned to schools far more quickly – allowing schools to immediately address academic issues. (Note that in the first year of PARCC assessments, data is returned later in the year as test experts set cut scores; this delay in receiving first-year results occurs with all assessments)

- **Reduced college remediation.** PARCC can help place students in credit-bearing college classes and reduce college remediation, where students need to pay for courses when entering college to be taught what they should have learned in high school. A full 70% of students entering New Jersey's county colleges can't begin their college career unless they pay for remediation classes.

How much time does PARCC take?

The total testing time allotted to students will range from 8.25 hours in grade 3 to 9.7 hours in grade 11.

Are students required to take PARCC? Can parents refuse to have their child participate?

Neither federal nor state law provides parents with an option regarding participation in the tests. The federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 has required 95% of all students in grades 3 to 8 be tested annually. Schools that don't meet the standard face implementation of a corrective action plan and possibly risk a loss of federal funding.

The vast majority of parents had their child participate in last year's administration of PARCC because they understood the benefits. PARCC will provide parents with an "academic check up" about their child's progress, and provide local schools with crucial information to improve classroom instruction. In those instances where parents refuse to have their children participate in the tests, local districts would apply their local policies.

Is this a "high stakes" for children?

For students in New Jersey, passing PARCC isn't required to advance from one grade to the next. It was not required with the former NJASK test, and it is not a requirement of PARCC tests. Local schools may use PARCC results as one of a number of measures to determine class placement, such as in a gifted program. Beginning with the Class of 2020, participation in the PARCC assessment will be required as part of the high school graduation requirement.

How will PARCC affect teachers?

State law requires a portion of annual evaluations for certain teachers to be based on growth on student assessments. This affects approximately 15 percent of teachers – those who teach mathematics and English language arts in the tested grades.

Is there too much testing?

The federal government and state require schools to test students annually. The PARCC assessments account for less than 10 hours of a 1,200-hour school year. The vast majority of testing is the result of decisions made at the local level, ranging from quizzes and finals to local schools purchasing commercial standardized tests. Districts could rely on PARCC instead of the other assessments to provide information on student academics.