

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?

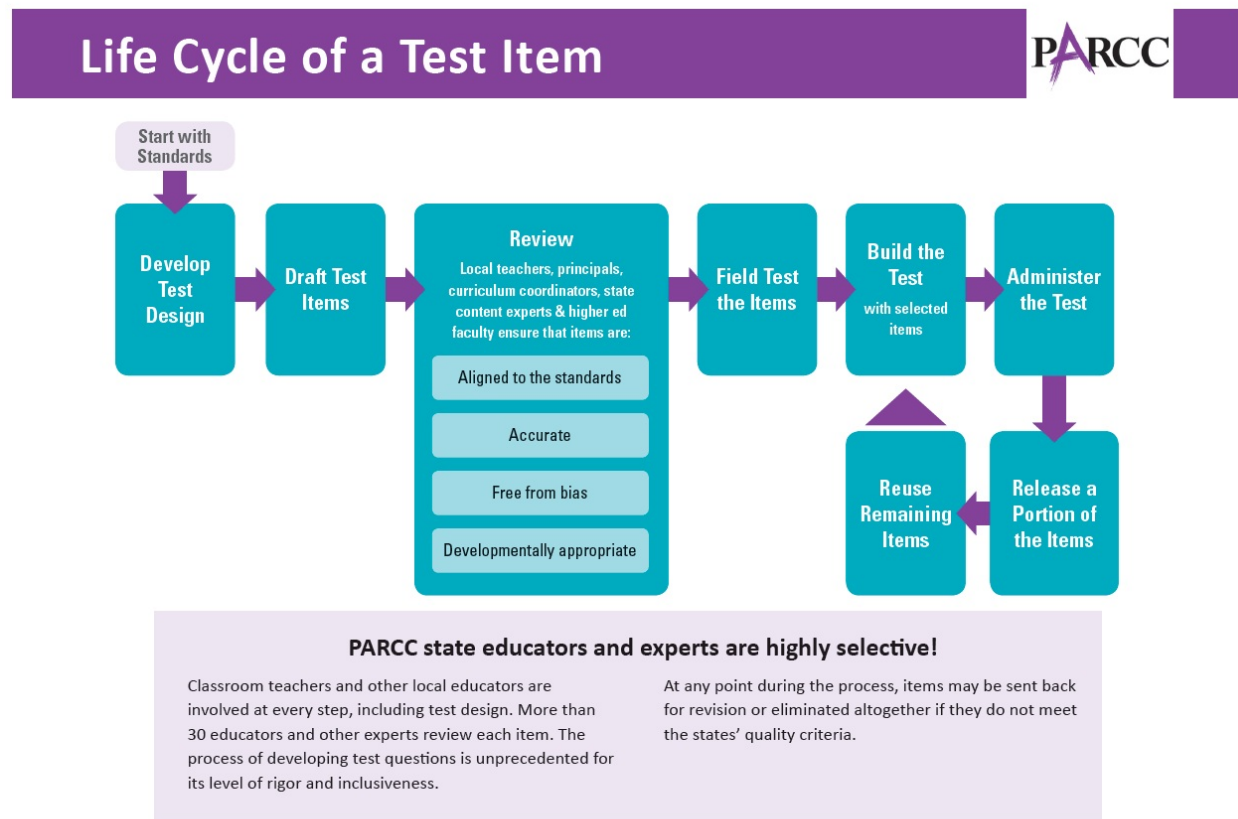
No. Protections are in place at both the state and federal levels, and through all contracts and agreements, intended to prevent student-identifiable data from being marketed or distributed. The selling of student data was never allowed under the previous tests in New Jersey, and it is not allowed under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

Where do PARCC questions come from?

Many New Jersey educators joined hundreds of educators from around the country to create, review and approve every test item. Each item was reviewed by no fewer than 30 educators prior to field test. Outcomes of the field test were then reviewed by 80 educators prior to inclusion on the operational tests. Educators will come together to engage in both reviewing student responses and standard setting in the upcoming months after the administration of PARCC. Unlike previous tests, many of these test questions will be made available to educators after the exam for future use in classroom instruction. For additional information, please see the figure below.



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Isn't PARCC a "high stakes" test that stresses our 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 NJ ASK test, and it is not a requirement of PARCC tests. However, local schools may use PARCC results as one of multiple measures used in determining class placement, such as a gifted program. Parent

concerns about how a local district may be using the results to determine student placement should be addressed with the local school board.

How will PARCC affect our students' teachers?

For teachers, state law requires a portion of annual evaluations for only teachers of mathematics and English language arts in the tested grades to be based on growth on student assessments. This affects less than 20 percent of teachers. The portion of a teacher's evaluation based on growth on student assessments is being reduced to 10% in 2014-15 – down from 30% the previous year – in recognition of the transition to the new PARCC assessment.

Can my school handle the Internet bandwidth required for the test?

Early concerns at the local level about the appropriate Internet bandwidth required to administer PARCC were put to rest as the result of an approach called “proctor caching.” This term means schools have the ability to download the tests from the Internet onto a single local server. Then, each student's device will connect with the designated school server. This approach effectively negates the need for extensive broadband capabilities. According to field tests conducted in spring of 2014, proctor caching can substantially reduce potential technology problems.

What if problems occur during testing?

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.

I've heard complaints that the schools had no time to prepare for PARCC. Was it rushed?

The PARCC exam has been several years in the making. In 2007-08, the High School Redesign Task Force called for changes that are now being implemented to move from the HSPA graduation test in the 11th grade to end-of-course assessments in grades 9-11. These changes were endorsed by the College and Career Readiness Task Force in

2012. In 2010, the New Jersey State Board of Education voluntarily adopted the Common Core State Standards as New Jersey's standards in English language arts and mathematics which PARCC is designed to measure. New Jersey joined PARCC in the spring of 2010. For two years the state tested portions of the PARCC assessments with a limited number of students and in a limited number of schools, and in 2013 the state conducted extensive field tests that included a majority of all schools and districts in New Jersey.

How much is this new test costing our town?

There is no local cost involved in developing or scoring the PARCC exam. The state pays for all PARCC exams. None of the costs for PARCC comes directly from the local school budget.

