

MYTHBUSTERS: Busting the Top 10 Myths about PARCC Assessments

May 2014

MYTH #1: PARCC test questions are unproven, so it's impossible to know if they're measuring what they should.

FACT: This spring PARCC is administering a [field test](#) – or a “practice run” – to more than one million students across the country to make sure the assessment and its technology work as intended, the questions accurately measure what students know and can do and that everything goes as planned.

- Through the field test process PARCC is ensuring that teachers, school administrators and students are prepared for the actual test that will begin in most states in the spring of 2015.
- PARCC leaders will use what they learn from the field test to improve the actual test.
- For more than a year PARCC's website has included [“Blueprints and Test Specs”](#) which ensure the test questions align to the state standards.
- PARCC already field tested its performance-based assessment, which focuses on writing in English language arts and real-world problems in math, in late March and early April of this year. It is field testing its end-of-year assessment, which focuses on reading comprehension in English language arts and conceptual understanding in mathematics, now through early June 2014.

MYTH #2: PARCC test questions are a secret – no one has seen them, so how can we trust them?

FACT: PARCC tests are designed to gauge what students know and what they can do based on college- and career-ready state standards in mathematics and English language arts.

- The assessments are aligned to [the standards](#), and the standards are available to the public. So, if teachers and students focus on learning that is based on the standards, then students will be prepared for the tests.
- PARCC has created full-length [practice tests](#) to show the types of questions students will see on the actual test. It also has made available many individual sample test questions.
- After the first year the test is given (2015), PARCC plans to post 40 percent of the test questions from that year on its website, offering parents, students and educators an even closer look at the test.

MYTH #3: PARCC tests are stressful and do not benefit students.

FACT: PARCC tests measure how well students are learning the skills, knowledge and critical thinking that employers and colleges say are most necessary for success after high school. This important snapshot lets students – and their parents, families and educators – know if they are on track to successfully achieve the next step in their education or career journey.

- To create an accurate snapshot, PARCC tests will be “harder” than most tests students take now. But students will have questions that reflect classroom assignments – such as writing assignments and multi-step math problems – not random multiple-choice questions.
- PARCC provides students, parents and educators with more immediate results of student performance.
- Because of its online format, PARCC results will be returned quickly, so teachers can use information to support students individually and help them stay on track. (At the high school level, PARCC assessments are designed to be used as final exams in mathematics and English language arts.)
- Teachers can use that same information to modify lessons and instruction to better meet all students' needs.

- While not encouraged, parents can opt for their child not to take any state test, including PARCC. But choosing the opt-out option means that students would not know if they are on track to advance to the next step in their education or career journey.
- PARCC high school assessments are designed to determine whether students have the skills and knowledge to succeed in first-year college courses. This means that eventually students bound for community or four-year college will not need to pay for and take separate course placement tests.

MYTH #4: PARCC does not benefit educators – it ties their hands and limits their approach to teaching.

FACT: PARCC provides teachers with important information and on-demand resources that, among other things, can be used to determine if their students are on track to meeting the standards and what help or additional time is needed if they are not on track.

- PARCC is developing an online site that will provide teachers with model curricula to help them think through lessons and formative assessment tools to maximize the use of the test results.
- PARCC requires students to write extensively, explain their thinking and solve multi-step problems. This gives educators important information that can be used to develop creative lessons and identify effective instructional approaches.

MYTH #5: Educators from my state were not involved in the development of PARCC.

FACT: Thousands of K-12 educators and hundreds of faculty from state colleges and universities—a much greater number than were involved in developing most prior state tests—worked together from across every state involved in PARCC to develop the most appropriate test questions for each subject and grade.

- Each state involved in PARCC has educators from K-12 and higher education who serve on working groups and review committees that have a direct hand in developing the test. Additionally, more than 1,000 educators serve as PARCC Educator Leader Cadre members and spearhead professional development.

MYTH #6: PARCC assessments are technology-based and schools that don't have the technology to administer the assessments will be at a severe disadvantage.

FACT: Transition time has been built in to allow schools to prepare for the administration of the assessments. Paper and pencil tests are still available.

- Many states currently administer some or all of their statewide assessments by computer.
- To help schools transition to the new tests, PARCC is offering paper and pencil versions of the test for the first year, so no district or school will be held to a disadvantage. It also is providing a multi-week window for testing that will allow schools to cycle groups of students through the computer-based assessments, as necessary.
- PARCC has been working closely with states to help them prepare for and work with schools to successfully transition to the next-generation assessments. The assessments are specifically designed to work with computing resources already in schools.

MYTH #7: The federal government plans to use PARCC to collect and analyze private data and information on students.

FACT: States control the data. Moreover, state officials that comprise PARCC's governing body approve all assessment decisions, including the use of test data. PARCC leaders have established strict data privacy policies that work to protect students.

- [PARCC's](#) privacy policies mandate that individual states—not private testing vendors or the federal government—control all of their student data. PARCC will not share student identifiable data of any kind with the federal government unless state leaders give their authorization.
- Just like with current state assessments, PARCC will adhere to all federal and state privacy laws, including the [Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act \(FERPA\)](#). Additionally, the [Higher Education Opportunity Act \(HEOA\) of 2008](#), [No Child Left Behind \(NCLB\)](#), the [Education Reform Sciences Act of 2002](#) and the [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\)](#) all prohibit the creation of a federal database with students' personally identifiable information.
- If anything, the privacy policies governing PARCC are more robust than those covering standard off-the-shelf tests administered by states.

MYTH #8: PARCC assessments are far more expensive than current state tests and not worth it.

FACT: Although some states may likely pay a little more, PARCC assessments are actually cheaper for most states. Over the years of implementation, PARCC costs actually will decrease thanks to the technology component of the exam.

- PARCC is continuously looking for creative ways to lower the price of the test. In fact, in early May 2014, PARCC announced that it lowered the price of the assessments by more than \$5 per student.
- Computer-based tests for grades 3-8 could be as low as \$18.97 per student, depending on the overall number of students taking the assessments across states.
- Computer-based tests for high school could be as low as \$9.99 per student, again, depending on the overall number of students taking the assessments across states.
- Unlike state-specific tests, PARCC enables comparisons across states. It also benefits from many states working together to design a next-generation assessment that addresses first-generation concerns in an affordable way.

MYTH #9: PARCC puts English language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities at a disadvantage.

FACT: Like any state assessment, PARCC includes [accommodations](#) for English language learners and students with disabilities.

- PARCC has a “universal design” to provide all students with an opportunity to demonstrate what they have learned. As part of this design, special tools are included such as a text magnifier or a text highlighter to aid those students with vision impairments, for example.
- PARCC allows for individual student accommodations that are intended to reduce or eliminate the effects of a student's disability or English language proficiency level.
- PARCC is working with states and nationally recognized experts to ensure all students have the accessibility and accommodation features needed for a positive and productive testing experience.

MYTH #10: PARCC assessments are too long and take too much time away from instruction and learning.

FACT: The time students will spend taking the PARCC assessments represents less than one percent of the approximately 1,200 hours students spend in classrooms each school year.

- PARCC assessments include writing and performance tasks at each grade, which take longer, but provide a clearer, deeper understanding of what students have learned.
- PARCC assessments also offer students multiple opportunities to demonstrate what they know, to ensure the tests are fair and accurate.
- PARCC is a key element of teaching and learning in the classroom.