

## A Guide to Parent and Educator Conversations about the PARCC Score Reports

*The PASS model refers to the term "parent" as any adult who plays an important role in a child's family life.*

The New Jersey Department of Education's model for home/school partnerships – **The Parent Academy for Student Success (PASS)** — provides documents and support tools intended to complement information about the state's academic standards and annual assessments for students. This document is part of the fourth PASS toolkit which provides resources, materials and opportunities for parents and educators to build partnerships around parent engagement in student learning and assessment. In the best interest of New Jersey students' academic success, PASS documents will occasionally include modified resources and informational items that are geared to the topic. This document has been adapted from [parconline.org](http://parconline.org).

Feature Information

PARCC  
Adapted

### A GUIDE TO PARENT/TEACHER CONVERSATIONS ABOUT THE PARCC SCORE REPORTS

<http://www.parconline.org/files/105/Educator%20Resources/480/PARCC%20Guide%20for%20Teacher%20Conversations.docx>

#### MEASURING PROGRESS AND INFORMING IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES

New Jersey's statewide assessments are intended to be valuable tools for parents, educators, students, schools and districts. These assessments are designed to do the following:

- Serve as an academic checkup to ensure that students are meeting grade-level expectations and remain on track for the next grade level and ultimately, high school graduation;
- Help teachers and schools identify students who need support so that they can provide additional instruction;
- Enable districts to identify persistent achievement gaps in order to create specific strategies and allocate resources appropriately; and
- Help districts measure the effectiveness of their curriculum, interventions and programs.

**Using Data as an Instructional Tool:** State test results provide valuable information about student learning. Test results from the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessment show how well a student performed in subcategories of skills in each subject to identify where a student is excelling and/or where he or she needs additional support or enrichment. Teachers can use this information to better plan instruction and provide more personalized instruction. Schools and districts can use the information to evaluate the effectiveness of curriculum and instruction. State assessment data can also be used to measure progress over time. The scores from this year's test set a new baseline for student proficiency that will allow educators, parents and students to measure progress moving forward. Test results from the Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM) assessment indicate how well students with the most significant cognitive disabilities have learned the most essential skills within the content standards.

**Data as a Tool for Parents:** Parents can use their child's test results to better understand his or her needs and strengths and work with teachers to identify resources that would provide additional support. The test results can be used as a springboard to start a discussion with teachers about how parents can help ensure their child is staying on track and learn how they can view their child's progress over time.

In partnership with PARCC, [Learning Heroes](#), which is initiative whose mission is to help parents understand the changes taking place in today's classroom, conducted research to better anticipate parents' questions upon receipt of their child's score report. The following list is a compilation of key questions about the PARCC parent score reports:

### **What is PARCC and why did New Jersey join?**

- PARCC is a common set of assessments in English language arts and mathematics designed to measure student progress toward achieving higher standards. The PARCC assessments, which replaced the NJASK and HSPA, measure students' ability to apply their knowledge of concepts rather than memorize facts. The adoption of the higher student learning standards triggered the need for a new and improved assessment to accurately measure students' standards-based knowledge and skills.
- New Jersey also joined the consortium of states to participate in the development of the Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM). It is an alternate State assessment administered to students with the most significant intellectual disabilities. Students in grades 3-8 and 11 who meet specific eligibility criteria will be administered the DLM assessment for ELA and math instead of the PARCC assessments. The DLM is based on the essential elements of the content standards which link the instruction of students with significant cognitive disabilities to the content standards developed for all students. For more information on DLM, visit: <http://dynamiclearningmaps.org/newjersey>.

### **Why do we need a new test and standards?**

- A new test was needed to measure the new, more rigorous standards that are guiding teachers' instruction in the classroom in ELA and math. These standards focus on the skills students need in the real world, such as critical thinking, analyzing and problem solving. The tests reflect the types of activities that students are now doing in the classroom every day.

### **Why does this test matter for my child?**

- The PARCC test helps parents understand how their child is progressing in math and English language arts/literacy (ELA) and how he or she is performing in comparison to peers in his or her grade level and school. It also informs parents where their child needs more support or additional challenges, which allows for more personalized instruction.

### **What types of questions were asked?**

- This year the PARCC test was broken down into two sections, performance-based tasks (completed in early spring) and the end-of-year assessment (completed near the end of the school year). Performance-based tasks are complex, multi-step writing assignments that ask students to apply their knowledge and skills to address real-world problems. In English language arts/literacy, students have to apply their research and writing skills, and in math, they must solve complex problems and then describe and defend their reasoning.
- The end-of-year assessment includes traditional multiple choice questions, as well as interactive questions that require students to drag and drop their answers into a box, create equations and fill in the answer. The questions on the test emphasize the real-world skills that are guiding instruction in the classroom: critical thinking, writing, problem solving, etc.  
To see a practice test for each grade, visit: <http://www.parcconline.org/assessments/practice-tests>

### **How many questions were there in each subject?**

- In math, the number of questions ranged between 50 and 56 depending on the grade level. In English, they ranged from 32-45 questions.
- To watch a video that explains the PARCC test and walks through practice tests in math and English language arts/literacy, visit: <http://bealearninghero.org/classroom/parcc/>

### **How were the questions scored?**

- Some of the test questions are scored automatically by computers, including, but not limited to, selected response questions. Others require scoring by trained scorers.
- PARCC partners with Pearson to hire qualified scorers who must have a Bachelor's degree in mathematics, reading, education, or a related field to score the tests. Applicants go through a rigorous and selective evaluation and hiring process to qualify as PARCC scorers. This includes extensive training, and scorers must pass practice scoring sets before being qualified as a PARCC scorer.
- Our higher education partners participate in major policy and operational decisions, including those related to the overall PARCC test design and scoring.

### **How was student performance for the categories in each subject determined?**

- Test questions are written to target different areas of the subject being tested, which are reflected on categories on the score report. For example, reading informational text in English language arts is one aspect. Most test questions only fall into one area, but some questions may cover more than one. A student must correctly answer a certain portion of the questions in each area to meet the expectation of the area.

### **Why do the [scores look different](#) from the scores from previous state tests?**

- The PARCC assessments, which replaced the NJASK and HSPA, measure students' ability to apply their knowledge of concepts rather than memorize facts.
- The PARCC assessments measure whether students have the knowledge and skills that they need to succeed in their education and work *beyond* high school and reflect new, higher expectations. Fewer students are likely to meet them initially. That doesn't mean they aren't doing as well – it just means the expectations are higher.
- New, higher standards are testing more complex skills including critical thinking, persuasive writing, and problem solving, which are different from previous tests.
- When student learning standards change and are more rigorous, a student who was meeting the previous standards might not be meeting the new learning standards. Your child is as smart as he or she was before, but might not yet be meeting the new higher standards.
- This first year's scores set a new baseline from which progress will be measured moving forward.

### **If fewer students are meeting expectations on this test than the previous state test, are they really accurate measures of student progress?**

- Yes. Education leaders expected fewer students to meet expectations because they are higher than they were before. We have raised the bar at each grade level. The new standards focus on more complex skills, and the tests are measuring these skills.

### **If scores from the PARCC test cannot be compared to previous test scores, why are these scores important?**

- The scores set a new baseline. They show how well students are progressing toward the new, higher standards. It is important for parents to know that their child is mastering the necessary skills to be successful in the next grade level.

### **How will students' scores be used?**

- Scores are used to identify where a child excels and can be challenged to go deeper into the subject matter, or where he or she needs extra support or practice.

### **Why are parents receiving test scores after the end of the school year?**

- Because this is the first year of the PARCC test, additional time is required to prepare the first score reports and ensure consistency of the scoring process. Performance levels, the five levels that indicate how well students

met grade level expectations, and the cut scores for each level must be set based on student results. This takes additional time. After this initial year, the goal is to have scores available to teachers before the beginning of the school year so they have an understanding of each student's strengths and weaknesses and can better personalize instruction.

#### **What if my child is doing well in the classroom and on his or her report card, but it is not reflected in the test score?**

- PARCC is only one of several measures that illustrate a child's progress in math and ELA. Report card grades can include multiple sources of information like participation, work habits, group projects, and homework that are not reflected in the PARCC score, so there may be a discrepancy.
- It is important to remember that this is only the first year of the test. PARCC scores reflect how students are doing in relation to the standards that are being measured. When the standards change as happened recently and are more rigorous, a student who was meeting the standards previously might not be anymore. The student is as smart as he or she was before, but might not be meeting the new higher standards. As students gain the skills and knowledge needed to meet the new higher standards, scores will improve.

#### **How can parents use the score reports to help their child? What type of skills and work are in each category and what resources are available for the categories?**

- The test results will include a breakdown of performance in categories within each subject. This will help parents understand where their child needs additional practice or to be challenged by going deeper into a subject. You can use these results to locate activities online that were designed specifically for every grade level. Parents can also use the test results to guide a discussion with their child's teacher(s) about additional supports or challenges that may be needed in class, as well as other ways to support each child at home.
- To find resources in every category and at every grade level, visit <http://bealearninghero.org/skill-builder> or <http://www.greatschools.org/gk/test-guide/>. Parents can use their child's individual score to find resources that will match his or her areas of strength and areas for improvement.

#### **From the score report, is it possible to identify where a student excels and where he or she needs more support and practice?**

- On your child's score report, the scores in math and English language arts/literacy are broken down into sub-categories. Your child's score in each will help you understand the progress your child is making and whether he/she needs additional practice or needs to be challenged by going deeper into a subject. Not all questions on the test are broken into the sub-categories so the sub-scores will not add up to the overall score.
  - The math test is broken down into:
    - Major Content
    - Additional and Supporting Content
    - Expressing Mathematical Reasoning
    - Modeling and Application
  - The English language arts/literacy test is broken down into:
    - Literary Text
    - Informational Text
    - Writing Expression
    - Knowledge and use of Language Conventions
    - Vocabulary

#### **What does it mean if a student did not achieve a Level 4? Should students be promoted to the next grade level if they do not achieve Level 4?**

- These tests are only one of several measures of how well a student is progressing toward achieving the standards, and they do not determine promotion or report card grades. Students who score at Level 4 or above in English language arts/literacy or math have met the expectations of the grade level in the subject matter. If your child scored at Level 3, he or she is approaching the expectations. If your child scored at Level 2, he or she may need additional support to meet expectations in that subject this school year. Students scoring in Level 1 did not meet expectations and will require substantial support to grasp the skills and concepts this school year.

**If a student was not familiar with computers, were accommodations made for technology, such as paper and pencil versions? Did students have enough time to finish?**

- There were resources available to give students the opportunity to practice on computers in class. This included taking PARCC practice tests, so they could become familiar with the tools, including calculators and highlighters, and the different types of questions, such as creating a graph, typing answers in a box, etc. To see a practice test, visit <http://www.parcconline.org/assessments/practice-tests>.
- There are also tutorials that were available to walk through the different types of test items and guide students through the use of the computer-based tools, including dragging and dropping, graphing and equation construction. To see the tutorial, visit <http://epat-parcc.testnav.com/client/index.html#login?username=PCTutorial&password=Tutorial>
- The PARCC test includes resources to address visual, auditory and physical access barriers, allowing virtually all students to demonstrate what they know and can do.
- Paper tests are only available for schools that do not meet the technology requirement, and either lack computers or sufficient Internet connections to support an online test. They are not an available option based on student preference. Students with a disability who need a paper test must have it listed as an accommodation on an IEP or 504.

**What if my child has special needs? How does the test account for that?**

- The PARCC tests can be taken by all students, except those with severe cognitive disabilities. The test has accommodations and supports that are built into it for students with an Individualized Education Plans (IEP) or 504 plans. Accommodations include digital scratch paper, Braille, closed captioning, and others.
- The Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM) is an alternate state assessment administered to students with the most significant intellectual disabilities. Students in grades 3-8 and 11 who meet specific eligibility criteria will be administered the DLM assessment for ELA and math instead of the PARCC assessments. The DLM is based on the essential elements of the content standards which link the instruction of students with significant cognitive disabilities to the content standards developed for all students. For more information on DLM, visit: <http://dynamiclearningmaps.org/newjersey>.
- ACCESS for ELLs is an English language proficiency assessment administered to kindergarten through 12th grade students who have been identified as English Language Learners (ELLs). It is given annually in World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) Consortium member states, which include New Jersey, to monitor students' progress in acquiring academic English. ACCESS for ELLs is not a PARCC exam. <http://www.nj.gov/education/bilingual/ells/20/>

**How can teachers help students improve and make progress on next year's test?**

- PARCC has developed a range of instructional tools to help teachers assess the extent to which students are on track to mastering the new standards at their grade levels. The tools help teachers pinpoint students' strengths, determine where students are struggling in key content areas, and use results to differentiate instruction. They also provide models for best practices in instruction and assessment. The tools include the following:
  - Formative Tools K-12;
  - Speaking and listening tools; and
  - Diagnostics
- Teachers can use the information in the score reports to guide instruction. Students' scores in the math and English language arts/literacy categories provide information about what additional evidence a teacher should gather in the classroom to make decisions about next steps for teaching and learning.

### How long will it be before progress is evident in student scores?

- As teachers spend more time focusing on the content outlined in the new standards and students gain more practice with the skills, the scores are expected to improve, especially for younger students. Several states have been using tests aligned to higher standards for a few years now and have seen dramatic improvements in student achievement.

### How will the PARCC test change in the 2016 administration?

- In the spring 2015 administration, the test was given in two parts: the performance-based test taken in early spring and the end-of-year test taken near the end of the school year. In 2016, these two windows will be consolidated into one, which will be up to 30 days. Most schools will complete the testing in one to two weeks.
- The total testing time for students will also decrease by 90 minutes. The math test will be 60 minutes shorter and the English language arts test will be 30 minutes shorter.

### RESOURCES FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- **NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION:** Provides more details about standards and assessments. <http://www.nj.gov/education/assessment>
- **UNDERSTANDTHESCORE.ORG:** Contains sample PARCC parent score reports, a score report guide, resources for educators and parents, as well as state-specific pages for additional information. <http://understandthescore.org> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=67G12fhSXmA&feature=youtu.be> (accompanying video)
- **PARCC:** Provides practice tests, sample questions and information regarding the development of the test. <http://www.parcconline.org>
- **BE A LEARNING HERO:** Provides parent-friendly information and resources on the standards and PARCC tests. <http://bealearninghero.org>
- **THE HONESTY GAP:** Offers more detailed information about the effects of the honesty gap in New Jersey. <http://www.honestygap.org/state/new-jersey>
- **DYNAMIC LEARNING MAPS ASSESSMENT:** Contains information regarding the state assessment for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. <http://www.dynamiclearningmaps.org>