



A FAMILY GUIDE TO YOUR STATE'S NEW ANNUAL TESTS: PARCC

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A Family Guide to Your State's New Annual Tests: PARCC

Why do we have new tests?

→ Your state adopted a set of new academic standards that focus on the critical-thinking, problem-solving, and reasoning skills students need in today's world. Known as the Common Core State Standards, they describe the skills and knowledge students should know at every grade level in ELA and math. These new standards require new tests to match the skills being taught in the classroom. These tests serve as an academic checkup, helping teachers and parents know how well students are progressing and if they are ready for the next step. The tests are designed to replace the previous statewide tests in ELA and math.

How are the new tests different?

→ **They are taken on a computer.** The goal of the online tests is to be more interactive for students and allow for personalization. When necessary, these tests can be taken with pencil and paper as well as accommodate for students with special needs.

→ **They allow students to show their work.** On the PARCC tests students are required to show their work and explain their reasoning so teachers can better understand what they know and where there are gaps that need to be addressed.

→ **They are separated into two sections.** The first section, called a performance-based task, includes complex multistep and writing tasks in ELA and math. This section must be hand-scored, which takes longer than machine-scoring, so it is given earlier in the year. The second section, known as the end-of-year assessment, combines multiple-choice with short answer questions.

→ **They measure critical thinking, and therefore take longer to complete.** Students will be asked to read and analyze complex texts and then write well-thought-out responses, all of which takes more time than multiple choice. This is the first time a statewide test has included a writing section at every grade level. That is the reason for dividing the test into two parts.

- Last spring, PARCC ran a field test with more than 1 million students to ensure that ample time was allowed to complete each section. The tests are broken down into smaller units that will take

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Reading at Home

- ▶ **Read aloud to your child above his or her own reading level.** It is so important for building knowledge and vocabulary. Select books that build on your child's interests.
- ▶ **Choose a balance of fiction and nonfiction.** Pleasure reading and reading for information don't have

to be mutually exclusive. Build your child's curiosity and explore new topics.

- ▶ **Keep books at home and encourage your child to read independently.** Have discussions at dinner about what they read and make connections throughout the day to the topics in the books they have chosen to read.

most students 40 to 60 minutes to finish, although schools will schedule 90 minutes for each unit. On average, students will take four hours each for the ELA and math tests.

→ **They provide valuable information about students' strengths and weaknesses.** Parents and teachers will receive a score report, including a breakdown of students' performance in subsets of skills within each subject. For example, the ELA report may show how well students performed in informational text, literary text, and vocabulary. These reports can be used by parents and teachers to figure out where students are on their continuum of learning. Some students may need a little more support and other students may need to be challenged by going deeper into a subject.

→ **They challenge students.** With a greater emphasis on deeper learning, there is no doubt that schools are expecting more from students, teachers, and parents. Lower test scores do not mean that students are performing worse or that they are learning less. It means the tests have changed and are measuring different things—such as how well students are mastering the skills they need to be ready for the next step.

→ **They do not lend themselves to “teaching to the test.”** These new tests focus more on applying skills than rote memorization, so they capture more information than ever before on how well students can think, comprehend, reason, and justify an answer. It is the daily practice of these skills in the classroom that will serve as the best preparation for this test.

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What do the PARCC test questions look like?

Previous Fifth-Grade Math Question:

The town of La Paz, Bolivia, is in the Andes Mountains. Which of these units could be used to describe the distance La Paz is above sea level?

- A. Degrees B. Feet
- C. Cubic Inches D. Pounds

PARCC Fifth-Grade Math Question:

Mr. Edmunds shared 12 pencils among his four sons as follows:

- Alan received $\frac{1}{2}$ of the pencils
- Bill received $\frac{1}{4}$ of the pencils
- Carl received more than 1 pencil
- David received more pencils than Carl

► **PART A:** On the number line, represent the fraction of the total number of pencils that was given to both Alan and Bill combined. Use the buttons on the right to increase or decrease the number of equal sections on the number line.

► **PART B:** What fraction of the total number of pencils did Carl and David each receive? Justify your answer.

Previous Seventh-Grade ELA Question:

Going to the movies is a major source of entertainment for many students. Imagine that the only discount movie theater in your area is closing. Write a persuasive essay in support of keeping the discount movie theater open.

PARCC Seventh-Grade ELA Question:

You have read a website entry and an article as well as viewed a video describing Amelia Earhart. All three include information that supports the claim that Earhart was a brave, courageous person. The three titles are:

- “**The Biography of Amelia Earhart**”
- “**Earhart’s Final Resting Place Believed Found**”
- “**Amelia Earhart’s Life and Disappearance**” (video)

Consider the argument each author uses to demonstrate Earhart’s bravery. Write an essay that analyzes the strength of the arguments related to Earhart’s bravery in at least two of the three supporting materials. Remember to use textual evidence to support your ideas.

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What is PARCC?

PARCC stands for Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers. A group of states brought educators and others together to develop tests aligned to the Common Core State Standards. The states and educators developed new tests with the goal of providing a deeper level of information to teachers and parents to support student learning.

When will I receive the test scores?

This first year of testing is a transition year. After students take the test, performance levels will need to be set for every grade. Performance levels are the cutoff scores that determine the different levels of performance, such as mastered, partially mastered, and not mastered. The performance-based assessments will need to be hand-scored and the score reports created. These processes will take longer to do, since this is the first year it is being done. So for the first year, scores will not be available until fall 2015. After the first round of assessments have been scored, scoring is expected to go more quickly and will be available before summer.

The scores will identify where students need extra support and where they excel.

What will the test scores mean for my child?

These test scores do not impact a student's GPA or college acceptance. The first year of scores will identify the areas where students need extra support and where they excel. They will serve as a new baseline so that progress can be measured from this year forward. After this transition year, scores will be used to personalize learning as well as measure how well schools, districts, and states are doing against the higher standards. In some states, public colleges and universities may use the grade 11 test score to help determine whether first-year students can begin taking credit-bearing courses.

How can these tests help my child's teacher?

Teachers need to understand how well students are mastering challenging skills and where there are gaps, so the tests can help inform instruction. ♦

Resources to Help Your Child

Be a Learning Hero: Contains helpful tips to support your child in ELA and math at home, as well as links to great resources. www.bealearninghero.org

PARCC: Contains a wealth of information, from practice tests to directions on how to navigate the test and use the features. www.parconline.org/for-parents

Great Schools Videos: Watch grade-level and content-specific videos of learning in action. www.greatschools.org/gk/milestones

Common Sense Media: Contains apps and games aligned to the ELA and math standards for students at different grade levels. www.commonsensemedia.org

