

Expanding Access

Accessibility Features and Accommodations for English Learners in PARCC Assessments—A Teacher’s Guide



In Brief

During the 2014–2015 school year, the new computer-based PARCC state assessments, which measure students’ mastery of Common Core State Standards in mathematics and English language arts/literacy in Grades 3 through 11, will be implemented. To provide equitable access to the online PARCC assessments (Performance-Based, Midyear, and End-of-Year), PARCC has embedded accessibility features for all students and developed accessibility features that educators can provide for individual students as needed. PARCC also has identified accommodations that English learners, English learners with disabilities, and students with disabilities may require.

To support educators in selecting, providing, and evaluating accessibility features and accommodations, PARCC has developed a policy document, the *PARCC Accessibility Features and Accommodations Manual*. This brief takes a look at what’s inside the manual, with a focus on how teachers can use the information to enhance the participation of English learners in the new PARCC assessments.

[Note: Although some English learners also may have a disability that entitles them to additional accommodations, this brochure focuses only on accessibility as it relates to English learners.]

Helping English Learners Show What They Know and Are Able to Do

All students, including English learners, are required to participate in state-wide assessments and have their assessment results included in the state’s accountability system. While there may be exceptions in some states, English learners will be expected to participate in the new PARCC computer-delivered assessments in English language arts/literacy (ELA/L) and mathematics.

PARCC has built into the computer platform accessibility features for all students and features that are identified in advance for students based on their individual needs. In addition, PARCC has identified accommodations for English learners that educators can choose from when deciding if a student requires support in accessing the assessment. Let’s take a look at the PARCC Accessibility System and how it applies to English learners.

A Focus on Accessibility

Expanding student access, increasing student participation, providing equitable opportunities for students to show what they know and are able to do—these goals are at the core of the PARCC Accessibility System and accessibility policies that are described in detail in the *PARCC Accessibility Features and Accommodations Manual*.

From the beginning, PARCC used the ideas of universal design to build its assessments. Universal design began in the field of architecture to design the world around us in a way that is accessible to a diverse group of people. For example, architects plan and design structures to be more accessible before they are built—ramps, curb cuts, braille elevator buttons, etc.—so more people can have access to their environment.

In the PARCC assessments, all students can use accessibility features that help them show what they know and are able to do. However, in the PARCC Accessibility System (see graphic on page 2), different levels of support are built into the PARCC assessments to allow more students to participate equitably. Let’s take a closer look at each level of support.

Features for All Students

PARCC accessibility features for all students embrace universal design principles by offering an array of tools, supports, scaffolds, and preferences. Students can choose to activate these on specific assessment items. They are embedded in the delivery platform or test administration and are typical of tools found in classrooms and used in everyday life. Examples include:

- Using a highlighter tool to shade text on the screen, which helps students recall information later.
- Having assessment directions read aloud and repeated.
- Enlarging text on the computer screen to see words, pictures, and details more clearly.



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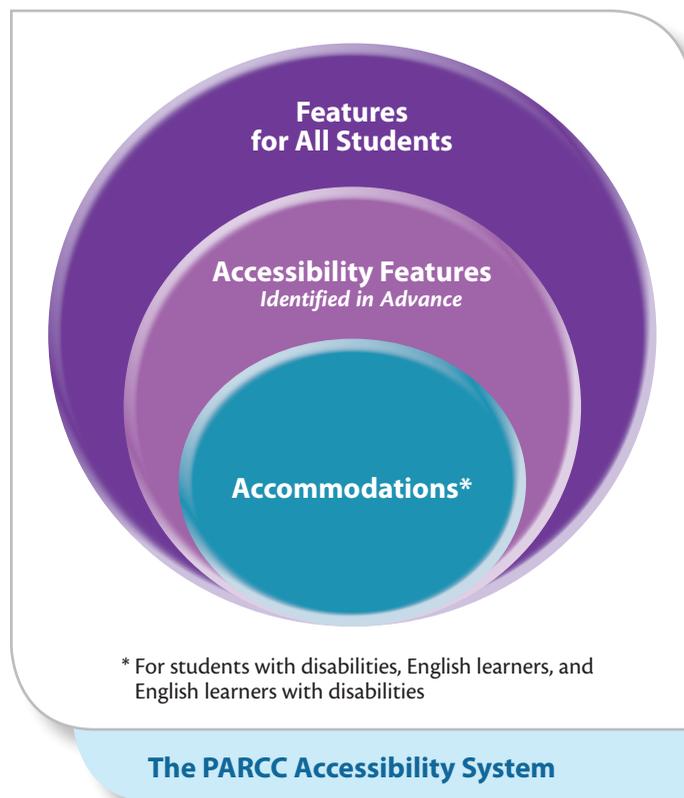
- Using a pop-up glossary (i.e., students hold their cursor over a word and its definition appears).
- Using a spell checker as they write.
- Writing and editing notes on an on-screen notepad.
- Using writing tools, such as copy, cut, paste, bold, etc.
- Flagging items that they want to come back to later.
- Raising and lowering the volume on their headphones.
- Crossing out answers for multiple choice items.

Other features that are not embedded in the computer platform include: allowing students to use headphones or noise buffers to filter external noise, redirecting the student’s attention to the assessment, providing blank paper for the student to plan and organize responses, and clarifying general administration questions.

To further increase access for all students—including English learners—PARCC provided assessment developers with accessibility guidelines for writing items that are bias free, sensitive to diverse cultures, stated clearly, of appropriate linguistic complexity, and formatted consistently. As such, PARCC test items allow eligible students to respond to the assessment items without the need for accommodations, if possible.

■ Accessibility Features Identified in Advance

Additional features also are available to all students based on their individual needs. Because having too many features on the screen at the same time may confuse or distract some students, an adult must identify the features in advance for a particular student. These are written in students’ English learner plans or listed on a sheet that



shows what the students need on the PARCC assessments. Students are not required to use the features. Examples include:

- Masking, which allows students to cover answer options.
- Adjusting the color contrast of the background or print.
- Using the line reader tool to move text up and down.
- Using text-to-speech for the mathematics assessments, which allows students to hear the test read aloud.

In addition, PARCC provides administrative considerations for all students. Principals have the authority to schedule students in other testing spaces and at different scheduled times, as long as all formal PARCC requirements are met. Examples of administrative considerations for all students include: testing in a small group, allowing frequent supervised breaks, taking the assessment at a different time of day, testing in a separate or alternate location, testing in a specified area or seating arrangement, and using adaptive and specialized equipment or furniture.

■ Accommodations for English Learners

While the PARCC assessments are quite accessible, some English learners also may need accommodations to access the test content and demonstrate their knowledge and skills. Accommodations for English learners either adjust the assessment conditions or adjust the language in which the assessment is given.

Accommodations should not reduce the expectation that a student will reach the same level of achievement as other students. Providing both linguistic and nonlinguistic support increases the probability that a student will receive an accurate score based on his or her knowledge and skills, because the content of the assessment does not change.

Accommodations are selected by educators who are familiar with the student (e.g., ESL/bilingual educators and content area teachers), with input from administrators, parents, and the student as appropriate, and/or a student’s English learner planning team if he or she has one. Section 5: Decision-Making Process for Selecting, Using, and Evaluating Accommodations for Students with Disabilities, English Learners, and English Learners with Disabilities in the *PARCC Accessibility Features and Accommodations Manual* provides an overview of steps that teams may consider when working with PARCC accommodations.

Students should be able to practice using the accommodations they need during classroom activities before the PARCC assessments are given. Accommodations provided on the PARCC assessments should be generally the same as those provided for classroom assessments. However, some classroom accommodations may not be permissible for the PARCC assessments if their use would change what the item is measuring.

Section 4: Accommodations for English Learners in the *PARCC Accessibility Features and Accommodations Manual* describes accommodations that will ensure valid and reliable scores on the PARCC assessments. Examples also are shown in the text box, English Learner Accommodations for the Computer-Delivered PARCC Assessments.

Students classified as English learners who also have a disability are eligible to receive both English learner accommodations and accommodations for students with disabilities. These are determined by

English Learner Accommodations for the Computer-Delivered PARCC Assessments

The *PARCC Accessibility Features and Accommodations Manual* lists all of the accommodations that educators and English learner planning teams may choose to give English learners based on their learning needs. Examples follow.

Extended time. The student is given more time to complete testing. A maximum of up to one school day is allowed to complete one assessment session during the prescribed testing window. Students who use this accommodation must have a quiet location in which to complete the assessment. This accommodation is highly recommended for English learners at the beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels.

General administration directions clarified in student's native language (by the assessment administrator). The assessment administrator clarifies only general administration instructions. Students should be given enough time to process directions and ask clarifying questions. Students must be tested in a separate setting with other students needing the same accommodation to minimize distractions. This accommodation is highly recommended for English learners at the beginning level and recommended for English learners at the intermediate level, but may not be appropriate for English learners at the advanced level.

General administration directions read aloud and repeated as needed in student's native language (by the assessment administrator). The assessment administrator reads aloud, and repeats as needed, assessment directions in the student's native language. Students should be given enough time to process directions and ask clarifying questions. Students must be tested in a separate setting with other students needing the same accommodation to minimize distractions. This accommodation is highly recommended

for English learners at the beginning level and recommended for English learners at the intermediate level, but may not be appropriate for English learners at the advanced level.

Scribe or speech-to-text: Responses dictated for mathematics assessment in English. Students dictate responses to mathematics assessment items either to a human scribe or through speech-to-text technology. Students must be tested in a separate setting. This accommodation is highly recommended for English learners at the beginning level and recommended for English learners at the intermediate level, but may not be appropriate for English learners at the advanced level.

Word-to-word dictionary (English/native language). Students use a bilingual, word-to-word dictionary or electronic translator. Dictionaries that include definitions or pictures are not allowed. Students should be familiar with the dictionary they will use on the assessment. Students should be given enough time to complete the assessment using the accommodation. This accommodation may not be appropriate for English learners at the beginning level, but is highly recommended for English learners at the intermediate and advanced levels.

For a more thorough discussion, see Section 4: Accommodations for English Learners in the *PARCC Accessibility Features and Accommodations Manual*.

Note: In the coming months, PARCC plans to release a policy for translation which may result in some accommodation changes for English learners.



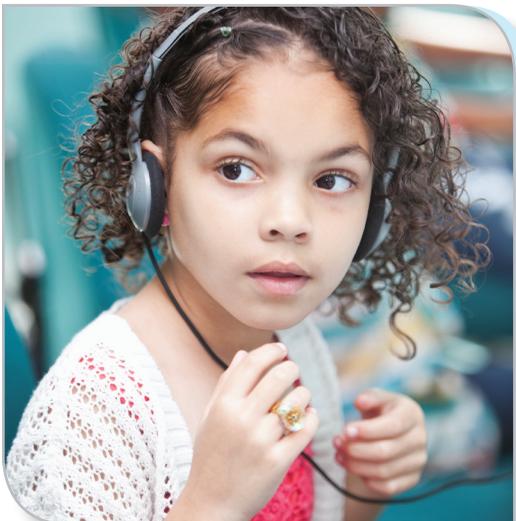
their individualized education program (IEP) or Section 504 team. For more information on accommodations for English learners with disabilities, see the *PARCC Accessibility Features and Accommodations Manual*, and the brochure, *Expanding Access: Accessibility Features and Accommodations for Students with Disabilities in PARCC Assessments—A Teacher's Guide*.

As students learn the English language, they will need fewer accommodations. PARCC has provided guidance for selecting accommodations specific to the student's English language proficiency at beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels. [*Note:* While PARCC states currently use their own assessments to determine language proficiency levels, they have begun work to formulate a common definition to be used across states for English learners and language proficiency levels.]

What Teachers Can Do to Support English Learners

- Expect all students, including English learners, to achieve Common Core State Standards at the appropriate grade level. Ensure that you fully understand the Common Core State Standards and are prepared to provide instruction that enables students to achieve the standards.
- Familiarize yourself with the accessibility features in the new PARCC assessments that are available to all students. [For more information, see Section 2: PARCC Accessibility System and Supports for All Students Taking the PARCC Assessments in the *PARCC Accessibility Features and Accommodations Manual*.] Provide opportunities for students to use these various features as part of regular classroom instruction and assessment. Invite students to tell you which ones are particularly helpful to them and which ones are not.

- Learn about accommodations for English learners. Pay attention to how particular accommodations will look different when presented online. [For more information, see Section 4: Accommodations for English Learners in the *PARCC Accessibility Features and Accommodations Manual*.]
- Make sure that English learners use accommodations listed on their English learner plans as part of regular classroom instruction and assessment and that they are provided with multiple opportunities to practice with online tools. Remember: Students should not use an accommodation for the first time on a PARCC assessment.
- Seek information and support from individuals who are knowledgeable about English learners (e.g., English as a second language/bilingual educators, educators, parents, etc.). Learn about English language proficiency and how it is being measured.
- Share information about the accessibility features and accommodations in the PARCC assessments with parents of English learners. Direct them to the online PARCC brochure, *Expanding Access: Accessibility Features and Accommodations for English Learners in PARCC Assessments—A Parent's Guide* (available on the PARCC website in both English and Spanish at <http://www.parcconline.org/parcc-accessibility-features-and-accommodations-manual>).
- Sign up on the PARCC website (www.parcconline.org) to receive updates on new resources and findings. Look for a series of practical tools (e.g., questions to ask students about accommodation tools) that will be released as appendices to the *PARCC Accessibility Features and Accommodations Manual* in the coming months.



Accessibility features and accommodations allow more students to participate in the PARCC assessments.

Find Out More

Visit the PARCC website (www.parcconline.org) for more information and resources, including:

- *PARCC Accessibility Features and Accommodations Manual* (<http://www.parcconline.org/parcc-accessibility-features-and-accommodations-manual>).
- *PARCC: A New Vision of Assessment* (<http://www.parcconline.org/about-parcc>). This PowerPoint presentation provides an overview of the PARCC assessments and describes advantages of the new PARCC system.
- PARCC Frequently Asked Questions (http://www.parcconline.org/sites/parcc/files/PARCCFAQ_8-12-13.pdf).
- PARCC assessment sample items (<http://www.parcconline.org/samples/item-task-prototypes>).
- PARCC blueprints (<http://www.parcconline.org/assessment-blueprints-test-specs>). PARCC has released a set of test information documents, including assessment blueprints and evidence statement tables, to help parents and educators better understand the design of the PARCC assessments.
- PARCC performance level descriptors (<http://www.parcconline.org/CCRD>). These describe what a student will be expected to know and be able to do.
- *Expanding Access: Accessibility Features and Accommodations for Students with Disabilities in PARCC Assessments—A Teacher's Guide* (<http://www.parcconline.org/parcc-accessibility-features-and-accommodations-manual>).

In addition, you may find these other resources helpful:

- Common Core State Standards (<http://www.corestandards.org>).
- English Language Proficiency Assessment for the 21st Century Consortium (http://www.k12center.org/rsc/pdf/elpa21_consorrtium.pdf). The purpose of the Consortium is to enhance the quality of assessments used by states for measuring students' English language proficiency, development, and progress by developing assessment instruments that align with the Common Core State Standards.