



Key Messages: Why Common Assessment and Why PARCC

The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) represents a fundamental shift in how we think about student testing, state-to-state. PARCC is based on the belief that standardized tests should not be about penalizing educators, students and schools. Instead, tests should be tools to help improve teaching and learning. The PARCC assessments are carefully crafted to give teachers, students, schools, and parents better information on how we're preparing our kids for careers and college — and life.

- **PARCC is a useful tool for teachers.** Computer-based assessments deliver real-time information on student knowledge that teachers can use to help inform instruction. No longer will teachers, students and families have to wait for results that don't arrive until the summer — when it's too late to use the information to improve.
- **PARCC is more engaging for students.** Times have changed. In the digital age, students process information differently than they did in the past. Retiring the old pencil-and-paper bubble tests and replacing them with online interactive tools is a more engaging way to promote student learning.
- **PARCC is developed by the states, for the states.** In a first-of-its-kind collaboration, states are working together to create the highest-quality test in the history of American public education. The result will be a product powered by states and local school systems, not the for-profit testing industry.
- **PARCC represents an economic opportunity.** For the first time, states and local communities will know how their students stack up against their peers in neighboring states and cities. This is a major development that gives educators, policymakers and community leaders better information on how to plan for and develop the workforce of the future.

Why does it make sense for states to work together on these common, aligned assessments?

1. Strength in numbers

- Best and brightest talent from the states coming together to push the market for quality and innovation
- Economies of scale – no individual state can develop an assessment system that is of the highest quality at the same price point they can get by working together
- When scores drop (and they will) much easier to face pushback when linking arms with high achieving states
 - 20 states saying *this* is the new benchmark for college and career readiness, *this* is truth in advertising is much stronger than 1 state making that claim.

2. Sharing resources/best practices across states

- Why should states reinvent the wheel?

So what is keeping states together and what have been the key drivers of the work?

- They want a cutting edge system that:
 - Is of the highest quality and aligned closely to the Common Core State Standards
 - Provides comparable data from school-to-school and state-to-state
 - Predicts whether students are college and career ready or on track – and that those results are accepted by higher education
 - Measures the full range of student performance, including that of high- and low-achieving students
 - Provides educators with timely data
 - Is affordable and sustainable

What will the tests offer that other assessment options won't?

- In the past, most states just developed test specifications and handed them off to testing vendors and hoped for the best. This is a very different process in which states themselves are in the **driver's seat**. The consortia assessments are our best chance to move the testing industry towards innovation and quality, to have comparable results across states at all grades, and to have a state-driven product that reflects state interests—not necessarily market interests.
- Hundreds of K-12 educators and higher education faculty have participated in the development of the tests and reviewing the items. In PARCC, 30 sets state eyes will have looked at every item.
- An independent panel of assessment and content experts from across the country recently evaluated hundreds of assessment items and technical specifications for both consortia of states working to develop next generation assessment systems.
 - The review panel gave strong ratings for assessment design and item development, based on demonstrable quality of assessment items and clear evidence of alignment to the CCSS.
 - No independent entity has evaluated the quality or alignment of off the shelf products against the standards.
- PARCC states have been working together to develop the assessment system for several years. If a state put out a solicitation for new assessment development now, there would be little time to build a new, high quality assessment in time for the 2014-15 school year. Doing so on a short timeline would make it difficult to get the quality and deep level of state-led quality assurance that PARCC will get.

Creating tests to match these new standards is incredibly hard to do and different standards require different tests

- Business leaders and education stakeholders should demand that their states get it right:
 - Writing at every grade
 - Research simulations
 - Multi-step mathematics problems that require students to show their work
 - College and career ready standard that is agreed to and accepted by higher education
- Downsides of states' going it alone or grabbing something else off the shelf
 - Loss of quality

- Loss of comparability
- Loss of state control over the product

- The Common Core standards—with their emphasis on problem solving, critical thinking and collaboration—represent the culmination of everything business and employers said they wanted in public education.

On their own, the Common Core standards can provide a powerful new framework for improving teaching and learning. But the standards, no matter how good, still must be well measured. Taken together, the Common Core and common assessments represent comprehensive scalable reform.