

Setting a New Baseline: New Test, New Scores



The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career (PARCC) tests were administered for the first time in spring 2015 and were designed to measure the new state standards that are guiding instruction in math and English language arts. The new, more rigorous expectations focus on the skills students need in today's world, including critical thinking, problem solving, and reasoning. Because the PARCC tests are measuring these complex skills, which are different from previous state tests, it is expected that scores on the PARCC test will look lower.

Why PARCC Scores Look Different than Scores on Previous State Tests

- ✔ **The tests measure performance against a higher set of standards.** 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.
- ✔ **The tests measure skills students need in the real world.** The PARCC tests go beyond multiple choice questions and require students to use skills like analyzing, problem solving, and writing effectively. All of these skills are necessary to practice and master to be successful beyond high school--whether in college, the military or a career.
- ✔ **There is an opportunity to make sure students ready for the next step.** The new tests provide accurate information about how students are performing against the new standards so that teachers, parents and students can start working together now to ensure kids are prepared for success – from grade to grade and beyond high school. It is easier to address any weaknesses early on so students can receive the support they need to get back on track.
- ✔ **No state is alone.** All states administering PARCC, as well as other new tests designed to measure the new standards, will see a change in scores.
- ✔ **It will take time.** While teachers have been gearing up for the new standards for almost four years, the tests are new and they ask questions in different ways, and require students to show their work. As happens with every new test, scores will start to improve as teachers and students become more familiar with the standards and acquire the skills and knowledge to meet them.

PARCC Scores

- ✔ **Students are just as smart, but the bar has been raised.** The new tests emphasize skills like critical thinking, and problem solving. Students are required to explain their answers, and defend their reasoning, which is different from previous tests. A student who was performing well on the previous test might not do as well on the new PARCC test.

A child who is learning to play basketball starts with a lower-than-normal basketball hoop. As she gets better, her parents raise the hoop to make it more challenging. She's probably going to score fewer baskets at first, but she's going to keep getting better.

- ✔ **Student scores will improve.** As students and teachers gain the skills and knowledge needed to meet the new higher standards, performance will also improve.

- ✔ **In the first year, PARCC scores set a new baseline.** This first year's scores will identify where students excel and where they need additional support, so that progress can be measured moving forward. In other cases where more rigorous tests have been implemented, students improved performance after the first year. In Massachusetts, for example, only about a third of students initially achieved proficiency on the more rigorous Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System. Now, a little over a decade later, close to 90 percent of students are proficient.