



**PARCC Assessment Administration Capacity Planning Tool and Guidance Memo
Frequently Asked Questions
March 2013**

1. What is the PARCC Assessment Administration Capacity Planning Tool?

PARCC is releasing a spreadsheet-based tool to support school budgeting and planning decisions ahead of the administration of the PARCC tests.

Districts and schools can use this new tool by entering a limited number of data points to generate information about whether they are ready to administer the computer-based tests in ELA/literacy and math in 2014–15 in grades 3–11 or whether they may have to make new device purchases or adjustments.

Getting this planning tool out to schools and districts now should give many of them two budget cycles to act on information from the planning tool and make any additional technology investments or adjustments to school technology configurations they need to prepare for the computer-based administration of the PARCC tests.

2. What test components will students take to get an overall, or summative, score at the end of the year?

PARCC has two required assessment components that make up a student’s overall score: the performance-based assessment (PBA) component and the end-of-year (EOY) assessment component. These will be given annually in ELA/literacy in grades 3–11; in mathematics, the assessments will be given annually in grades 3-8 and in high school math courses (Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II or their equivalent).

The performance-based assessment component is administered after about three-fourths of the instructional year is completed and requires students to apply their knowledge to complex problems and produce a product. For example, a student might be asked to read texts and write essays drawing from those. Similarly, a student could be asked to apply a key math concept toward solving real-world problems.

The end-of-year assessment component is administered after about 90 percent of instructional days have passed. It requires students to demonstrate the knowledge and skills they have acquired by responding to computer-scored questions.



These assessments will address a long-standing concern among educators and parents about large-scale student assessments – they have been unable to capture some of the most important skills that we strive to develop in students.

Both the performance-based assessment and end-of-year assessment component will be administered via computer devices. Computer-based testing offers a number of advantages over pencil-and-paper tests. They are more efficient, innovative, engaging, and they produce timely data for students and teachers that can improve teaching and learning.

3. What are some of the key variables schools should consider as they plan for the PARCC assessments?

As schools use the PARCC Assessment Administration Capacity Planning Tool to prepare for the roll out of the assessments in 2014-15, they should primarily consider:

- the maximum length of the testing window for the performance-based and end-of-year assessment components, or the maximum number of days over which testing can take place;
- the estimated time it will take the average student to complete each component of the assessment (estimated time on task);
- available testing space in schools;
- the number of computer devices available for assessment;
- the ratio of students to each device; and
- the available bandwidth, or speed and level of access a school has to the Internet.

4. How long will students spend on PARCC assessments during the school year?

Based on early research on the PARCC test items, PARCC is releasing information about estimated testing times for each grade. These include the estimated time it will take students to complete all of the sessions of the performance-based and end-of-year components in both ELA/literacy and mathematics at each grade level. The estimated times for both components and both subject areas are as follows:

- 8 hours on performance-based and end-of-year assessments in ELA/literacy and math annually in 3rd grade
- Just over 9 hours to assess those subjects in grades 4–5
- A little less than 9 ½ hours in middle school
- A little more than 9 ½ hours in high school

The above times refer to on-task time, or the time it will take most students to complete the PARCC summative tests. While it is anticipated that most students will complete the test sessions in the estimated times, states will make a limited amount of additional time available to learners who work at slower rates.



Of course, schools will continue to make special accommodations for children with disabilities who have specific requirements and arrangements established.

5. How do the estimated testing times for PARCC compare to current state assessments?

The PARCC assessments are replacing current state summative tests in grades 3–11 in ELA/literacy and math. They are not being given in addition to the old tests.

For some states, the PARCC testing time will add up to more assessment hours than they currently have in place for ELA/literacy and mathematics. But for other states, this will result in about the same or less testing time.

One reason a state may see its estimated testing time increase is PARCC assessments will test writing skills at every grade level, which are not included in some current state assessments. PARCC also will assess critical thinking and problem-solving skills in an in-depth manner, and the new tests will be linked to college and career readiness standards so students and parents will have data about whether students are on track for success or need extra help.

The Common Core State Standards call for students to engage with new texts and apply mathematical concepts in real-world settings. Students will need sufficient time to engage with the questions and form their responses, and the PARCC assessments are being designed to provide them with the time and space to show what they know and can do.

6. How many days will schools have to administer the PARCC assessments?

Schools and districts will have a *maximum* of two four-week windows to complete the administration of the performance-based and end-of-year components (one window per component). **States or districts can choose to administer the tests in a shorter time span if they have sufficient capacity to do that.** Some states are working with schools and districts to set a shorter window.

The new capacity planning tool will help schools figure out how many days they will need to administer the tests given their current capacity and how they may reduce that number by increasing the devices used to administer the assessments or making adjustments to their technology configuration.

7. How many devices should schools have to make sure they administer the assessments within the testing windows?

The number of devices a school needs for the assessment is largely dependent on the number of students enrolled at each tested grade level, the number of students that can be tested simultaneously



given the way in which available devices are deployed (e.g., in labs, in classroom, on carts, etc.) and the available bandwidth capacity. To assist schools in planning for an adequate number of devices for PARCC assessments in 2014-2015, PARCC has developed some “rule of thumb” guidance.

This rule of thumb is divided between schools that will be testing three grade levels (e.g., K-5, 6-8, or 9-12 schools), and schools that will be testing six grades (e.g., K-8 schools). These different types of schools will have different assessment capacity needs.

The rule of thumb provides two recommendations:

- The minimum number of devices that a school will need for its largest tested grade to administer the assessments within the 20 day maximum window, based on its, and
- The recommended number of devices that a school will need for its largest tested grade to administer the assessments in fewer than 20 days.

At a minimum, schools with up to three tested grades should plan on having at least one computer device for every two students in its largest tested grade. A school that has six tested grades, such as a K–8 school, should plan on having one device per student in its largest tested grade.

PARCC recommends that schools go a bit further if they are able. PARCC recommends in schools with up to three tested grades, that administrators plan to have one device per student in the largest tested grade. In schools with six tested grades, PARCC recommends one student per device for the two largest tested grades.

For more information about PARCC, please visit www.parcconline.org

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