

Expanding Access

Accessibility Features for All Students and Accommodations in PARCC Assessments—A Parent's Guide



In Brief

During the 2014–2015 school year, students in Grades 3 through 11 will take the new computer-based PARCC state assessments. These online assessments include tools built into the computer platform for all students and a number of accessibility features that can be provided for individual students based on need. These tools and features—which children typically use in the classroom and daily life—are intended to expand access for them to show what they know and are able to do.

In addition, the PARCC assessments include accommodations that students with disabilities, English learners, and English learners with disabilities may need. These will reduce barriers for students and help them participate equitably in the assessments.

This brochure describes how PARCC will provide accessibility features for all students and accommodations for special populations. It discusses how parents can use the information to improve their child's participation on the new online PARCC assessments (Performance-Based, Midyear, and End-of-Year) in English language arts/literacy and mathematics.

Introduction to PARCC

The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) is a group of states—including yours—that have come together to develop high-quality student assessments aligned with the new Common Core State Standards in English language arts/literacy and mathematics. These computer-delivered assessments will replace previous state tests in those subjects.

The PARCC assessments are designed to measure whether students are on track for college or careers. To this end, PARCC assessments ask students to demonstrate critical-thinking and problem-solving skills in an in-depth manner. Students are asked to answer various types of questions, show their work, and explain their reasoning. For example, in math, your child will be asked to explain mathematical reasoning, not just get the answer correct. In English language arts/literacy, your child will be asked to read complex passages and identify evidence that can be used to make a persuasive argument.

PARCC assessments may be different from assessments your child has taken in the past. For example, PARCC assessments:

- Are built on a computer system that is easy for students to learn and use. Schools will be able to use a range of devices from desktop computers to laptops and tablets—the same technology that your child uses for instructional purposes throughout the year.
- Ask students to read real-life texts and solve meaningful problems based on high-quality classroom work.
- Provide useful information about students' academic achievement—what they are doing well and where improvement is needed—in a timely manner.
- Show whether students are on track for success in college or a career.
- Build in accessibility features that help all students do their best, and expand access for students with disabilities, English learners, and English learners with disabilities by providing a range of accommodations.

Many students will participate in computer-delivered assessments for the first time. Let's take a look at how accessibility features and accommodations will be handled in the new computer-delivered PARCC assessments.



A Focus on Accessibility

Expanding student access, increasing student participation, and providing fair and equal opportunities for students to show what they know and are able to do—these are the goals of the PARCC Accessibility System. These goals and accompanying policies are described in the *PARCC Accessibility Features and Accommodations Manual*. The manual is the result of two years of focused work and consensus among the states. It reflects considerable public comment and expert and stakeholder input.

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 in a way that is accessible to a diverse group of people. For example, architects plan 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 below), 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 provide a range of tools, supports, and preferences that are available to any student at his or her

discretion during assessment. They are embedded in the delivery platform or test administration and are typical of features already used by students on their computers in classrooms and at home. Examples include:

- Using a highlighter tool to shade text on the screen, which helps students recall information later.
- Having test directions read aloud and repeated as needed.
- Enlarging text on the computer screen to see words, pictures, and details more clearly.
- Using a spell checker as they write.
- Using a pop-up glossary (i.e., students hold their cursor over a word and its definition appears).
- 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 accessibility features that are not embedded in the computer platform include:

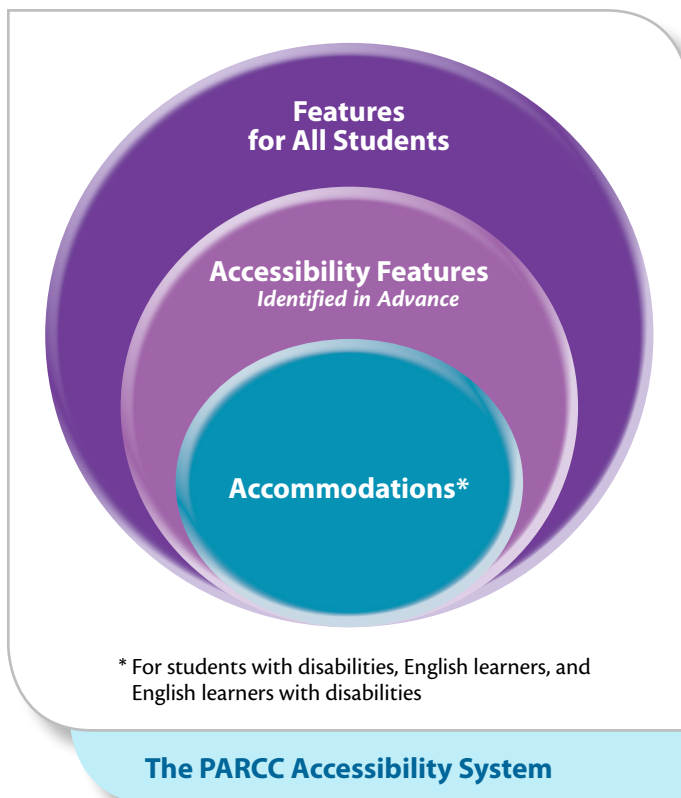
- Allowing students to use headphones or noise buffers to filter external noise.
- Redirecting the student's attention to the assessment.
- Providing blank paper for the student to plan and organize responses.
- Clarifying general administration questions.

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

Students should be exposed to accessibility features prior to testing, and should have the opportunity to select and practice using them. Practice assessments with accessibility features will be made available for teacher and student use throughout the year.

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. Prior to testing, an adult will make sure that the feature is available to the student, who may or may not choose to use it. Examples include:



“Many features that were once considered accommodations are now available for all students through the online delivery platform and the commitment to universal design principles.”

*Diane August
Member, PARCC Technical Work Group*

- 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 assessment read aloud.

In addition, PARCC provides administrative considerations for all students. Principals can 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.
- Using adaptive and specialized equipment or furniture.

Accommodations

Although the PARCC assessments are quite accessible, some students with disabilities, English learners, and English learners with disabilities also may need accommodations to access the assessment content and demonstrate their knowledge and skills. Accommodations change either the way the student answers the questions, the way in which the assessment is given to a student, or when the assessment is scheduled. They increase the probability that the student will receive an accurate score based on his or her knowledge and skills because the content of the assessment does not change.

For more information on accommodations, see the *PARCC Accessibility Features and Accommodations Manual*, and/or parent brochures that explain accommodations for special learner populations (all found at <http://www.parcconline.org/parcc-accessibility-features-and-accommodations-manual>).

What Parents Can Do to Support Their Child

- Familiarize yourself with the Common Core State Standards (<http://www.corestandards.org>). Talk to your child's teachers about what he or she is learning. Find out if your child's teachers are using new instructional techniques to help students learn the new Common Core State Standards and how you can support those efforts at home.
- Learn about the PARCC assessments—their purpose, what they measure, and how the results will be used.
- Learn about PARCC accessibility features for all students. Identify those that your child may need or find helpful to use at home, in the classroom, and on the PARCC assessments.
- Find out how your child's teachers are preparing for the new assessments and how they are helping your child get ready.
- Talk to your child about the accessibility features he or she already uses on tests. Discuss whether or not your child thinks they are helping. Share this information with your child's teachers—or encourage your child to share his or her ideas with teachers.
- Share information with educators about your child's strengths and needs related to using computers for work assignments. Include information about the types of strategies your child uses routinely to complete homework assignments and other tasks in the home and the community.



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

- Encourage your child to use the available accessibility features at home. Talk to your child about how the individual features may be used to show what he or she knows and is able to do on different types of questions and tasks. Have your child practice using various accessibility features.
- Ask about the technology your child will be using for the PARCC assessments. Ask about how your child can practice using the technology during school and in the home, if possible.
- Make sure your child is willing to use any accessibility features that are identified for him or her. Inform your child's teachers if your child is having difficulty using a particular accessibility feature.
- Familiarize yourself with the complete PARCC Assessment System. There will be five components: an optional Diagnostic Assessment, which will provide an early indicator of student knowledge because it will be given early in the school year; an optional Midyear Assessment, which consists of open-ended tasks that emphasize hard-to-measure standards; a required Speaking and Listening Assessment; and a required Summative Assessment divided into two components—a Performance-Based Assessment and an End-of-Year Assessment. The Summative Assessment will give students a score that indicates whether they are college-and-career-ready.



PARCC assessments provide students with accessibility tools they frequently use in classrooms and daily life.

“National PTA supports PARCC in its efforts to allow every single child the opportunity to show what he or she knows, and to allow parents and teachers of these children access to the quality information they need to make decisions about improving learning outcomes.”

*Otha Thornton
National PTA President*

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 better understand the design of the PARCC assessments.
- PARCC performance level descriptors (<http://www.parcconline.org/CCRD>). These describe what your child will be expected to know and be able to do.