

FAQs for Parents

Frequently Asked Questions about Maryland's New State Tests: PARCC

Maryland's statewide assessments are changing. Beginning in the 2014-15 school year, students will take a new test called PARCC, which stands for the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers.

The PARCC tests are designed to match the State's new academic standards, the Maryland College and Career-Ready Standards, and will provide a better assessment of whether students are meeting grade-level expectations and are ultimately on track to be ready for college or a career by the time they graduate from high school.

To ensure parents have the information they need to prepare their children for the tests, the Maryland State Department of Education has compiled this list of Frequently Asked Questions.

WHAT SUBJECTS WILL THE PARCC TESTS COVER?

Students in grades 3-8 will take the PARCC tests in English language arts/literacy (ELA) and math.

At the high school level, students will take PARCC assessments in Algebra I, Algebra II, and English 10.

WHAT IS HAPPENING TO THE MARYLAND SCHOOL ASSESSMENT (MSA) AND HIGH SCHOOL ASSESSMENT (HSA)?

The PARCC tests in ELA and math are replacing the MSA exams in reading and math at the elementary and middle school levels. The science MSA will continue to be given to students in grades 5 and 8.

PARCC tests are also replacing the HSAs in Algebra I and English 10. High school students will continue to take the HSAs in Biology and Government.

The PARCC tests in ELA and math are aligned to the Maryland College and Career-Ready Standards, unlike the MSA and HSA exams for those subjects. The PARCC assessments are designed to be an extension of instruction and mirror expectations in the classroom.

WHEN WILL THE PARCC TESTS BE GIVEN?

The PARCC assessments are given towards the end of the school year or course, and are administered in two parts:

- The Performance-Based Assessment (PBA) is given approximately 75 percent of the way through the school year or course, typically in March.

- The End-Of-Year (EOY) test component is given approximately 90 percent of the way through the school year or course, typically in April or May.

Each school system will choose the exact dates to test within these testing windows.

WHY ARE THERE TWO DIFFERENT COMPONENTS TO THE PARCC TESTS?

The two components of the PARCC tests – the PBA and the EOY – use different types of questions to gauge different aspects of student learning, and will ultimately provide a deeper, more comprehensive understanding of student progress.

The questions on the PBA component ask students to perform a task not just pick an answer – for example write an essay, create a model, or draw a graph. In ELA, the PBAs focus on reading comprehension, vocabulary, and writing when analyzing texts. In math, the PBAs focus on reasoning and modeling, and include questions that require both short and extended responses.

The EOY test components include selected response and short answer questions. In ELA, the EOYs focus on reading comprehension and vocabulary. The math EOYs ask students to demonstrate a solid understanding of math concepts as well as mathematical fluency.

Students' scores on the PBA and EOY are combined to provide overall scores for ELA and math.

HOW WILL THE PARCC TESTS BE ADMINISTERED?

The PARCC assessments are designed to be taken online. However, schools will have the option of using a paper and pencil version of the test for the first three years that the PARCC assessments are given (through school year 2016-17).

Schools will be able to use a range of devices to administer the online version of the PARCC tests, from desktop computers to laptops and tablets – the same technology that students use for instructional purposes throughout the year.

These advanced, online assessments include more interactive questions, which model real-world experiences and keep students more engaged. The online tests also feature built-in tools for all students (such as a highlighter tool; spell check; writing tools like cut, copy, paste, and bold; a pop-up glossary; etc.) as well as a number of accessibility features that can be provided for students based on need.

When fully implemented, online tests will allow for faster scoring and reporting of results, and provide better information about how students are performing.

HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE STUDENTS TO COMPLETE THE ASSESSMENTS?

Students will not take the PARCC tests all at once – the test components will be taken over multiple days during two testing windows. In total, the estimate time that students will spend taking the PARCC tests (both the PBA and EOY test components in ELA and math) is as follows:

- 8 hours for 3rd grade.
- Just over 9 hours in grades 4-5.
- A little less than 9 ½ hours in middle school.
- A little more than 9 ½ hours in high school.

WHY ARE THERE SO MANY DAYS OF TESTING?

There is a 20-day testing window for each component of the PARCC test (the PBA and EOY) in order to provide schools with flexibility in scheduling and a sufficient opportunity to administer the assessments. Individual students will only participate in testing during a small portion of that timeframe.

HOW ARE TEST SCORES USED?

Test results are used to measure student progress toward grade-level Maryland College and Career-Ready Standards, as well as progress toward graduation.

Teachers and school systems will review results, along with other factors, to determine if students require additional assistance or advancement.

Passing the high school level PARCC assessments in Algebra I and English 10 will not be a graduation requirement until the 2016-17 school year.

Students who take those courses during 2014-15 and 2015-16, the first two school years that the PARCC assessments are given, will need to pass the course and participate in the PARCC tests to fulfill their graduation requirement.

Students who take these PARCC assessments in 2016-17 and beyond will need to pass the tests or participate in the Bridge Plan for Academic Validation, as well as pass the course.

WHAT HAPPENS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS AND STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS?

PARCC is designed to provide accurate measures of achievement and growth for all students, including those with disabilities and English language learners.

The online tests provide accommodations that can address many visual, auditory, and physical-access barriers for students with disabilities, while enabling them to take assessments at the same time as others in the class.

Just like prior State assessments, there will be accommodations for English language learners at various levels of language proficiency, depending upon eligibility based on different skill levels.

ARE SAMPLE TESTS AVAILABLE?

Yes, sample tests and a tutorial are available on the PARCC website at <http://parcc.pearson.com>. We encourage you to view the tutorial and try the sample test items with your child to help them prepare for PARCC.

WHAT ELSE CAN I DO TO PREPARE FOR PARCC?

Meet with your child's teacher to discuss his or her progress throughout the year.

View samples of new test questions and get more information about PARCC at www.parcconline.org.

Become familiar with Maryland's College and Career-Ready Standards, which PARCC is designed to assess, at www.md12.org.

The national PTA also provides great resources at www.pta.org/parentsguide.

Visit <http://MarylandPublicSchools.org> for additional information. New resources are added regularly.