

A BIG WIN FOR LOUISIANA STUDENTS

Common Core State Standards



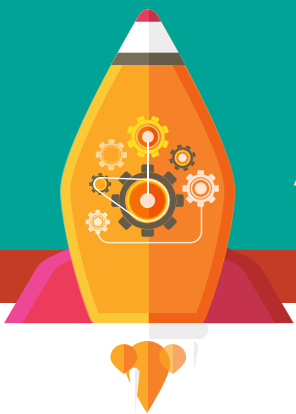
Louisiana students have long been performing at the bottom of the pack. On the last Nation's Report Card (also known as the National Assessment of Educational Progress, or NAEP), Louisiana students made no progress and continued to achieve some of the lowest scores in the nation. In 2010, the Louisiana Board of Education adopted a set of higher academic standards that raised the bar for students. These standards emphasize real-world skills like critical thinking and problem-solving while providing consistent expectations for students across state lines.

Louisiana's Proficiency Results on the Nation's Report Card

Year	4th Math	4th Reading	8th Math	8th Reading
2011	26%	23%	22%	22%
2013	26%	23%	21%	24%

Teachers are already seeing positive effects in student learning after teaching under the standards for a full school year. With the adoption of improved standards, Louisiana is one step closer to ensuring that students will have the opportunity to reach their full potential. However, there is still more work to be done.





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The Need for High-Quality Aligned Assessments

The current Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (LEAP) does not measure the critical thinking and real-world skills that students are learning and presents a misleading picture of student performance. According to the LEAP, about two-thirds of our fourth and eighth grade students are proficient in math and reading; in comparison, NAEP shows that not even one-quarter of students in most grades and subjects can demonstrate proficiency. The low bar set by the LEAP creates an inaccurate portrait of our school system and deceives parents and students. Despite receiving a diploma, many students are leaving high school unprepared for success in college and careers.

Louisiana needs high-quality aligned assessments that not only identify individual student strengths and weaknesses, but also allow for comparisons to students in other states. Without these assessments in place, parents and students have no way to know if students are mastering the content and skills necessary to be successful, and teachers are missing a critical gauge of whether they are providing effective instruction. As a state, we will have no assurance that Louisiana students are receiving a high-quality education and are on par with their peers across the nation. In short, the absence of a high-quality aligned assessment cheats parents, teachers—and most of all—students.

What Does a High-Quality Assessment Look Like?

A high-quality assessment:

- Is developed with input from both academic and testing experts, as well as teachers;
- Is comparable with other states;
- Is field-tested and reviewed before full implementation;
- Assesses a wide range of real-world skills using a variety of question formats;

- Includes formative, or interim, assessments that act as “academic checkups” to make sure students are keeping pace; and
- Provides detailed and timely feedback that sends an early warning signal to teachers if students are struggling so interventions can be put in place.

For the past four years, teams of Louisiana’s academic experts and teachers, as well as state and district leaders, have been working tirelessly to develop improved assessments through the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness of College and Careers (PARCC). More than 75 Louisiana teachers participated in the development of PARCC assessments—more than any other standardized test used in the state. The PARCC assessments were field-tested in both math and English language arts this past spring by 50,000 students in 14 states, including Louisiana. Because of the state’s membership in PARCC, stakeholders will be able to accurately compare Louisiana’s students to those in other states for the first time. More than 6,000 Louisiana parents have signed petitions and continue their support for standards and the PARCC assessments.

Students in grades 3–8 will take the aligned tests in reading and math this spring. PARCC is clearly the best choice for the state, as Louisiana teachers played a critical role in its development, and it has already been introduced to students across the state. The facts are simple—if PARCC is abandoned, policymakers must start from scratch. There would be little assurance that future tests would be aligned to the standards, creating chaos and confusion. A different test would likely lack input from Louisiana teachers and not be comparable to other states, defeating one of the main benefits of the new standards and aligned assessments. Our students should be able to compete with others from all over the country, but to do so, we need to be sure they are mastering the same skills. The PARCC assessments provide Louisiana parents, business leaders, and educators with the necessary information to determine whether students are ready for college and careers.

Ensuring a First-Rate Assessment

The Louisiana Board of Education implemented a policy delaying the use of PARCC test results in teacher evaluations and school letter grades until fall 2016 to allow teachers and students time to adjust. At the heart of accountability is the need to ensure that all students across Louisiana are receiving the same high-quality education. Meaningful tests serve as school-wide checkups that can identify struggling students and schools in need of extra support so interventions can be put in place. In addition, improved assessments can identify high-achieving students who require support to maintain their academic engagement and provide them the resources necessary to continue to help them excel. Efforts should focus on supporting implementation and students, not causing further delay. Changes in the timeline for fully transitioning to PARCC will lower morale and commitment among educators. In addition, it will delay the valuable information the tests have to offer.

It is important to continue to advocate for the criteria that will make Louisiana's test a strong measuring stick of how students are doing on the path to college and careers at the state and national levels. Leaders continue to be enthusiastic about the PARCC assessments because they include so many of the criteria that make up a high-quality test. As supporters, we need to ensure that the state test not only accurately measures real-world skills, but also possesses the characteristics that will make it a useful tool to help students improve.



Why Do Students Deserve Better Tests?

- Better tests give students an honest, objective report of how they are doing.
- Better tests ensure all students are held to the same expectations.
- Better tests identify struggling students early on so they can get the help they need.

What is PARCC?

- A consortium of states working together to create new computer-based assessments that will measure whether a student is on track to graduate high school prepared for college and careers.
- The PARCC tests aim to:
 - Accurately measure student progress toward college and career readiness;
 - Assess a wide range of skills, including real-world skills like critical thinking and writing; and
 - Provide real-time information on student progress to help guide teacher instruction and improve learning.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Will the new test replace the old state test?

- Yes. When the PARCC tests are given in the 2015–2016 school year, they will replace the LEAP in grades 3–8 in math and English language arts. Students in high school will continue to take end-of-course LEAP tests that are aligned to the standards.

2. Why can't Louisiana create its own test?

- Louisiana has invested a great deal of educator time and resources into the PARCC test development process. For the first time, state education officials and teachers have had input into what the state assessment looks like.
- It cost Louisiana nothing to join the PARCC consortium. Estimates for creating a brand new test are in the range of \$20 million.
- If the state changed course and chose to create its own test, it would mean additional work for teachers and administrators, as well as the additional cost of designing another test. The test would also not be comparable to any other states, so there would be no way of measuring how well Louisiana's students are mastering the common standards relative to their peers across the country.

3. What kind of professional development did teachers receive in preparation for the standards and the new test?

- The state has recruited and trained close to 4,000 teachers to support the instruction of the standards in their own schools (at least one teacher per school). Many teachers attended local professional development training, and some districts gave teachers the opportunity to design their own aligned district-specific curricula.

4. What kind of student data will be collected? Will it be released?

- After passing legislation last year, Louisiana has some of the strictest student data privacy laws in the country. The state is required to

collect data on the performance of schools under the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, but is prohibited from collecting certain types of information without parental consent. State officials do not have access to any student identifiable information, which will only be available at the local level. *Every student will have an anonymous student identification number so that privacy is protected.*

- Data collected will include student test scores and information such as attendance, support services, and academic growth. The only information that will be publicly available will contain aggregate data for schools, districts, and subgroups.

5. Do students need to be computer literate?

- When the computer-based assessment is given in 2016, students will need to be computer literate. Paper and pencil versions will be given in 2015 and will be available for the first three years of testing if schools cannot meet the technology requirements. This past summer, 76% of schools met the minimum technology requirements and 79% met the minimum bandwidth requirements.
- While it may take some time to ensure that every school has the hardware necessary and meets the technology requirements, this is a smart investment. Technology is not going away. Ensuring that all students, regardless of geography or household income, have equal access to technology is critical to preparing students for a 21st century competitive workforce.

6. Where can I go for more information?

- www.louisianabelieves.com
- www.corestandards.org
- www.parcconline.org
- www.BusinessForCore.org