

# A BIG WIN FOR NEW JERSEY STUDENTS



## Common Core State Standards

In 2014, New Jersey's on-time high school graduation rate was 88%—higher than many other states. On the 2013 New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJASK), more than two-thirds of 4th and 8th grade students demonstrated proficiency in math and reading, with the exception of 4th grade reading. Unfortunately, the Nation's Report Card, also known as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), told a different story—less than half of 4th and 8th grade students demonstrated proficiency in both subjects. The box at right illustrates the differences between the two tests' results.

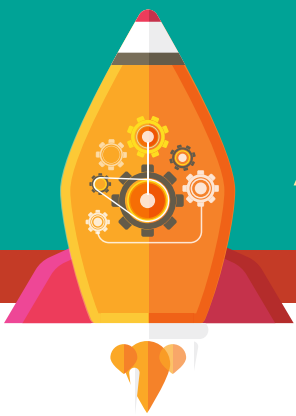
New Jersey Proficiency Performance on the NJASK and The Nation's Report Card

Assessment	4th Math	4th Reading	8th Math	8th Reading
NJASK	78%	59%	70%	82%
NAEP	49%	42%	49%	46%

In 2010, 32% of students at state colleges and universities had to enroll in at least one remedial class because they lacked the skills to successfully complete college-level classes. At community colleges, 70% of students required at least one remedial course. Although students were achieving proficiency in the classroom and graduating high school, they were not ready for success after graduation. In 2010, the New Jersey State Board of Education adopted a set of college- and career-ready standards in English language arts (ELA) and math to prepare students for success in college and the workforce.

New Jersey's previous state standards were rigorous in comparison to other states, but still needed improvement. According to a 2010 report by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, some of the standards did not include clear, measurable objectives, and the ELA standards were missing up to 35% of the most essential content. In the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's 2007 *Leaders and Laggards* report, the state standards received a C in rigor.

With the adoption of higher standards, New Jersey is one step closer to ensuring that students will have the opportunity to reach their full potential. By 2020, 66% of jobs in New Jersey will require a postsecondary credential. However, only 46% of adults in the state currently have such a credential, resulting in a 20% skills gap. Higher standards are essential to helping close this gap.



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## Better Standards Deserve Better Assessments

Teachers across New Jersey have been hard at work putting these higher academic goals in place. It has been a significant undertaking involving countless hours of professional development, curricula alignment, and learning strategies to engage students more deeply than ever before.

The next phase of this work is to implement an improved test that is more meaningful to students, teachers, and parents in determining which skills a student has or has not yet mastered. The state needs a test that can measure the critical thinking and problem solving skills that our students need to succeed—and existing state tests cannot evaluate this level of learning. Improved assessments present an opportunity to move beyond tests that simply measure rote memorization skills to ones that mirror the higher standards and provide teachers with valuable information on how effectively they are teaching and students are learning.

Putting better assessments in place needs to be part of a larger system of accountability that supports student achievement and holds schools accountable for successfully teaching the content outlined in the standards. At the heart of accountability is the need to ensure that all students across New Jersey receive the same high-quality education. Meaningful tests serve as school-wide academic checkups that can identify struggling students and schools in need of extra support and interventions. In addition, improved assessments can identify high-achieving students who require support to maintain their academic engagement and provide them with the resources necessary to continue to excel.

For the past four years, teams of academics, testing experts, and teachers across the nation have been working tirelessly to create two testing options aligned

to the higher standards: PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium. These two tests were field tested in spring 2014 in 35 states including New Jersey, where students took the PARCC field test.

The tests aim to do the following:

- Accurately measure student progress toward college and career readiness.
- Assess a wide range of real-world skills, including critical thinking and writing.
- Provide real-time information on student progress to help guide teacher instruction and improve learning.

New Jersey is a governing member of PARCC. In spring 2015, these assessments will be administered to students in grades 3–8 and 11 in math and ELA. They will replace the existing New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJASK) and the High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA). These high-quality assessments require students to apply critical thinking, problem solving, and analytical skills to solve multi-step, complex questions. They will give a deeper understanding of how well students are mastering the skills they need at every grade level to succeed in college and careers. The PARCC assessments were designed to provide teachers and parents with valuable, actionable information that can be used to guide instruction and ensure that students are keeping pace.

During this transition, it is important to advocate for key criteria that will make the state test a strong measuring stick of how New Jersey students are doing on the path to college and careers at the state and national levels. There is a large-scale movement in New Jersey aimed at encouraging students to opt out of the PARCC assessments. This effort has been fueled by many of the common misconceptions surrounding the PARCC assessments. Despite this, leaders continue to be

enthusiastic about the PARCC assessments because they include so many of the criteria that make up a high-quality aligned test. As advocates, we need to ensure that our state tests accurately measure college and career readiness, and have these characteristics to serve as a useful tool to benefits students.

## A High-Quality Assessment:

- Is developed with input from academic and testing experts, as well as teachers.
- 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 ensure that students are keeping pace.
- Provides detailed and timely feedback that acts as an academic checkup.
- Sends an early warning signal to teachers if students are not on track so that interventions can be put in place.
- Is comparable across states.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### 1. How are the PARCC assessments different from previous state assessments?

- The PARCC assessments are aligned to the Common Core State Standards, so they measure the real-world critical thinking and analytical skills students need to be successful in today's economy. The NJASK and HSPA tests could not evaluate this level of thinking.
- Since colleges and employers expect students to be able to think critically and solve problems, the PARCC assessments reflect these skills. Test questions require students to do more than simply identify the correct answer. Now, students spend time reading closely, analyzing texts, and applying mathematical skills and concepts.



## The Common Core State Standards:

- Outline the skills and information that students need to master in every grade to graduate ready for college or a career.
- Emphasize real-world skills, like critical thinking and problem solving.
- Help parents and teacher know how their students compare to those throughout the state and across the nation.

## Better assessments:

- Give us an honest, objective report of how our students are doing.
- Ensure all students are held to the same expectations.
- Identify struggling students so they can get the help they need.
- Identify high-achieving students to provide them with the resources necessary to continue to excel.

## PARCC:

- A group of states working together to develop high-quality, computer-based assessments that measure college and career readiness in both math and English language arts.

## 2. Did the federal government create the PARCC assessments?

- No. The PARCC assessments were created by a consortium of states that gathered educators, academics, and testing experts to develop high-quality assessments aligned to the Common Core State Standards. Since states worked together, this resulted in a reduced cost to individual states.
- The federal government supported PARCC, but played no role in the development of the consortium or the assessments.

## 3. How much do the PARCC assessments cost?

- The PARCC assessment will cost \$29.50 per student. This is significantly less than what New Jersey spent per student on the previous state assessments. This is also a very small fraction of the per-pupil taxpayer dollars spent every year. It is a worthwhile investment since the PARCC assessments can be used to measure student progress and improve learning.

## 4. Will the new test replace the old state test?

- Yes. Beginning in spring 2015, the PARCC assessments will replace the NJASK in grades 3–8 and the HSPA in grade 11.

## 5. How will test scores impact schools and districts?

- School-wide test results will be used as one measure for school accountability. Just as tests are used as academic checkups for individual students, they are used as checkups for schools. Districts need to identify low performing schools so that interventions can be put in place to ensure all students across New Jersey will receive a high-quality education.

## 6. How will test scores impact students?

- Scores from the PARCC assessments will not be used to determine student placement or graduation eligibility until 2019.
- Score reports will provide teachers with better information about specific areas of students' strengths and comprehension so teachers can implement additional supports or challenges, resulting in a more individualized learning for students.

## 7. What kind of data will be collected? Will it be released?

- Under the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, New Jersey is required to collect data on school performance. Aggregate data collected includes student test scores and information such as attendance, support services, and academic growth. *The state will not release any personally identifiable student information.* Only individuals who interact with students on a daily basis, such as teachers and parents, are allowed to see student-specific information.
- Federal law protects the privacy of student information and education records through the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). The only information that will be publicly available will contain aggregate data for schools, districts, and subgroups.

## 8. Do students need to be computer literate?

- Students need to be computer literate. School districts across the state have provided training sessions and practice tests for students to ensure they are familiar with the technology and are prepared for the assessment. Paper and pencil versions will be available during the first three years of the new testing for schools that cannot meet the technology requirement.
- While it may take 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—both the ACT and SAT exams will be progressing to computer-based formats as well. 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.

## 9. Where can I go for more information?

- [www.bestfootforwardnj.org](http://www.bestfootforwardnj.org)
- [www.state.nj.us/education/sca/parcc](http://www.state.nj.us/education/sca/parcc)
- [www.parcconline.org](http://www.parcconline.org)
- [www.businessforcore.org](http://www.businessforcore.org)