

# A BIG WIN FOR DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA STUDENTS



## The Common Core State Standards

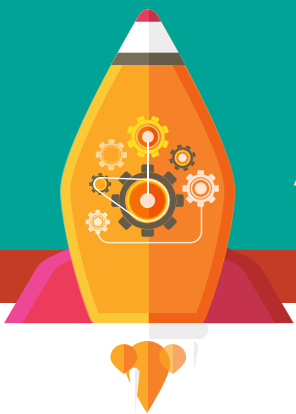
In 2013, the District of Columbia public schools' on-time high school graduation rate was 58%—one of the lowest in the nation. That same year, fewer than half of all 4th and 8th graders demonstrated proficiency in reading and math on the Nation's Report Card (also known as the National Assessment of Educational Progress, or NAEP); results were only slightly better on the 2013 D.C. Comprehensive Assessment System (DC CAS). Despite this weak student performance, many of these scores were all-time highs, and the District of Columbia posted the second strongest gains of any state in the nation except for Tennessee. A factor that greatly contributed to D.C.'s improvement was the adoption of a rigorous new set of core academic standards in English language arts (ELA) and math.

The District's Proficiency Performance on the 2013 Nation's Report Card and DC CAS

| Assessment | 4th Math | 4th Reading | 8th Math | 8th Reading |
|------------|----------|-------------|----------|-------------|
| NAEP       | 52%      | 38%         | 38%      | 35%         |
| DC CAS     | 56%      | 51%         | 57%      | 48%         |

Adopted in 2010 by the D.C. State Board of Education, these standards were put in place to ensure that students not only graduate high school, but that they receive a diploma prepared for college, careers, and life. Teachers began teaching the content outlined in the standards in 2011. With the adoption of higher standards, Washington, D.C., is one step closer to helping ensure that students will have the opportunity to reach their full potential.





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## Better Standards Deserve Better Assessments

Teachers throughout Washington, D.C., 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 district needs a test that can measure the critical thinking and problem solving skills that our students need to succeed—and existing 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 Washington, D.C., 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 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 and Washington, D.C., where students in 77 schools participated in 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 skills, including critical thinking and writing skills.
- Provide real-time information on student progress to help guide teacher instruction and improve learning.

Washington, D.C., is a governing member of the PARCC consortium. District of Columbia teachers played an important role in the development of the PARCC tests by reviewing questions and passages as well as providing feedback on test items. The high-quality, computer-based assessments match the high expectations of the Common Core State Standards. The PARCC tests require students to apply mathematical knowledge to solve real-world problems and apply research and writing skills in longer essay questions. Test results will give students, parents, and teachers specific feedback about whether or not students are on track to graduate ready for college, careers, and life, and in what areas they may need extra support. Teachers will give students interim assessments at various points throughout the year that will serve as academic checkups to ensure that students are on track throughout the year. Students in grades 3–8 will take the PARCC English language arts and math tests in spring 2015. High school students in Algebra 1, Geometry, and English 1 and 2 will take the end-of-course tests.

During this transition, it is important to advocate for key criteria that will make the state assessments a strong measuring stick of how Washington, D.C., students are doing on the path to college and careers at the state and national levels. Leaders continue to be enthusiastic about the PARCC tests because they meet so many

of the criteria that make up a high-quality aligned test. As advocates, we need to ensure that our updated assessments accurately measure college and career readiness and have these characteristics to serve as a useful tool to benefit 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 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. What is the difference between standards and curriculum?

- Standards are a set of guidelines for what students are expected to know and be able to do at specific points in their education. Standards provide the foundation for key components of the education system, including curricula, instructional materials, teacher training, and assessments.
- A curriculum is the course of study covering the standards. It is set by local school districts and includes the lesson plans, programs, and textbooks that teachers use to teach the content and skills outlined in the standards.

### 2. If students are learning with different curricula, how can they take the same test?

- Although teachers use different materials and curricula, students still learn the same skills outlined in the standards. Teachers can be creative in their instruction, designing lessons to best reach their students and establishing a classroom where all students can achieve.



## 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.

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

- The PARCC assessments will replace the DC CAS in English language arts and math in grades 3–8 and the end-of-course tests for Algebra 1, Geometry, and English 1 and 2.

### 4. Will test scores impact schools and districts?

- School-wide test results will be used as one measure for school accountability. Just as teachers use tests as academic checkups for individual students, they are also checkups for our schools. Districts need to identify schools in need of extra support so that interventions can be put in place to ensure that all students across a district and in the state will receive a high-quality education.

### 5. How will test scores impact teachers?

- Individual Value-Added Student Achievement Data (IVA) is a measure of a teacher's impact on student learning. It is assessed by state assessment scores and other student-specific factors. Due to the transition to the PARCC assessments, IVA will not be included in teacher evaluations for the 2014–15 school year.

### 6. How will test scores impact students?

- Currently, there are no test requirements for graduation.

### 7. What kind of professional development did teachers receive in preparation for the standards?

- Since 2011, teachers and administrators have been receiving guidance and training in implementation of the standards in English and math.

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

- Under the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Washington, D.C., 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 District of Columbia 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.

### 9. How were teachers involved in the test development process?

- Washington, D.C., teachers reviewed and provided feedback on test items. In addition, some teachers are playing an important role in providing information about PARCC to their fellow educators and the public through the Educator Leader Cadre, a group of teachers who share best practices and are active leaders in state and local implementation.

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

- Students need to be computer literate, but paper and pencil versions will be available during the first three years of testing for schools that do not yet meet the technology requirement or prefer that method.
- The District of Columbia has gone to great lengths to meet PARCC's technology recommendation of having at least one computer for every three students. 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 workforce.

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

- [www.parcconline.org](http://www.parcconline.org)
- [www.dcps.dc.gov/DCPS/In+the+Classroom](http://www.dcps.dc.gov/DCPS/In+the+Classroom)
- [www.BusinessForCore.org](http://www.BusinessForCore.org)