



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE COST OF PARCC TESTS

1. How much will it cost states to purchase the new PARCC tests?

The PARCC summative tests in reading, writing and math are estimated to cost \$29.50 per student for computer-based administration of the assessment. That is the total annual cost to test each student in these areas.

2. How does the cost of PARCC tests compare to the cost of the tests states currently use?

About half of the states in the PARCC consortium currently spend more on their summative tests, while the remaining states spend less. However, the median cost for the current assessments used by the PARCC states is \$29.95 per student for both English language arts (ELA)/literacy and math. Although the PARCC tests generally cost about the same as the average current state tests, they will be higher quality and include multiple performance tasks in both ELA/literacy and math.

3. What do states get when they purchase the PARCC summative tests?

The estimated cost includes an ELA/Literacy test and math test, both of which will include a performance-based assessment and end-of-year assessment.

The performance-based assessment will be administered about three-quarters of the way into the school year (early spring) and will capture critical-thinking and problem-solving skills that generally aren't measured well on current tests. Math will focus on reasoning and modeling real-world problems. The ELA/literacy test also asks students to write short analytical essays based on their readings.

The end-of-year assessment will be administered near the very end of the year (late spring). In math, students will be asked to demonstrate further understanding of key concepts and mathematical fluency. The ELA/literacy end-of-year test centers on reading comprehension.

Taken together, the tests will address a longstanding concern among educators and parents about large-scale student assessments — they have been unable to capture some of the most important skills that we strive to develop in students.

The public invests in schools and deserves to know how well students are doing in return. We need to measure what students are learning, and we need to do it in a meaningful way. PARCC assessments will be computer-based tests that will provide timely feedback and data to teachers and students and will complement and resemble the kind of high-quality coursework you see in great classrooms every day.



Our country spends on average more than \$10,600 a year for every public school student. In that context, \$29.50 is very little — about as much as half a tank of gasoline in a family-sized car or dinner for four at the typical fast food restaurant.

4. What are the benefits of working as a consortium to develop and purchase tests?

By working together and pooling resources to develop new, shared tests aligned to the new Common Core State Standards, PARCC states **will spend less money** than if they were working individually. States on their own just can't get the same level of quality and rigor at this price. They will also be able to compare results, in a way they cannot now. In a digital, 21st-century world, what it takes to succeed isn't different from state to state. There is no reason to have different expectations of students in Arizona than in Maryland.

6. What impacts the cost of developing and administering tests?

Key costs include developing and field testing the assessment items; building and supporting the staff needed to develop the tests; creating an online delivery system; distributing the tests; receiving and scoring them; publicly releasing test questions, which means that they can't be used in the future; and analyzing and reporting results.

7. What kind of technology will schools need for computer-based administration of PARCC?

PARCC has shared recommended specifications for computer hardware, input devices, and security requirements and has also suggested recommended levels of bandwidth that will support schools instructional and assessment needs. The number of devices schools need to administer PARCC tests depends on the number of students enrolled in a school, the number of students that can be tested at once and the available bandwidth capacity. See more here: <http://www.parcconline.org/technology>.

Some states are already conducting online assessments, while others are still making the investments in infrastructure and devices. Of course the technology that schools invest in for use during the PARCC assessments will be a valuable instructional resource for teachers and students throughout the school year.

PARCC has also released a planning tool for states to help them determine what they need to do to get ready to administer the new tests. See more here: <http://www.parcconline.org/assessment-administration-guidance>.

8. Will paper-and-pencil versions of PARCC be available, and what will those cost?

PARCC will have paper-and-pencil tests available in at least the first year of administration (2014-15). They are projected to cost \$3.00 to \$4.00 more per student than the regular computer-based PARCC tests because of additional costs required for shipping and receiving; printing, scanning, scoring, and distributing the paper-and-pencil tests; and keeping them secure.



8. Will PARCC release test questions at the end of each year?

Yes. PARCC plans to release test questions when returning scores at the end of the year. This will increase transparency and provide teachers with data that can help inform instruction. Releasing questions increases costs, because new test questions need to be developed for the next groups of students. But because the potential instructional value greatly outweighs the costs, PARCC estimates it will release more than half of the performance-based math and ELA/literacy questions and more than one-third of the end-of-year test questions every year.

9. Will the cost estimates change over time?

The cost projections for the PARCC tests will continue to be refined over time as the development of the tests continues, including as technology for automated scoring continues to improve since it will be possible to achieve greater cost savings when the scoring of student essays can be automated. PARCC will continue to innovate and leverage technology. So, while costs may need to be adjusted, quality will continue to rise.

11. What else can you say about the value of the PARCC tests?

- K–12 educators and higher education faculty are helping to create the tests, which are being developed by states for states.
- In ELA/literacy, students taking PARCC will earn a separate writing score at every grade level, which isn't the case with most current state assessments.
- PARCC tests will mirror what great teachers are already doing in their classrooms and will provide data that helps teachers target instruction. Independent research shows that many states' current standards and tests are at a lower level. These are tests worth taking.
- In **ELA/literacy** PARCC will provide information about:
 - whether students can read and comprehend texts of sufficient complexity;
 - how well students can integrate information across texts / multi-media to write a persuasive argument; and
 - the degree to which students can use context to determine the meaning of academic vocabulary.
- In **math** PARCC will provide information about:
 - whether students understand and can use important math ideas, including number sense, algebraic thinking, geometry and analyzing data;
 - the extent to which students can use math facts and reasoning skills to solve real-world problems; and
 - how well students can justify their approach to solving a problem.
- PARCC will provide meaningful data for all students, including high- and low-performing students, while current tests tend to focus on those hovering around the middle.



- High school tests will lead to a college and career readiness determination that will enable students to place directly into credit-bearing, entry-level college courses without the need for remediation upon graduation. The assessment system will also signal when students may need extra help.
- PARCC will return results quickly, before the school year ends. Now, teachers, students and parents often get results well into the summer or next school year, when they're not very useful.
- The tests will be innovative, engaging and computer-based, in keeping with what students need in the 21st century.
- Teachers and families will get detailed reports, helping them better understand each child's mastery of the standards and what additional support or enrichment he might need.
- States will be able to benchmark student progress on a broader scale – comparing results with states and districts across the country.

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