
PASS 2: Buzz Words - A Shared Language to Support Student Success

Parent Academy for Student Success #2 Measure What Matters: Assessing Student Learning and The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers Assessment (PARCC)

The list below is intended to clarify terms that are frequently used in conversations about the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and assessment of student learning. The CCSS are student learning standards that were adopted by the New Jersey State Board of Education in 2010. To accurately measure student learning and progress with the standards, the state has selected a test called the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC). PARCC was developed by a partnership of states that use the CCSS to shape teaching and learning and will be administered for the first time in spring 2015.

The terms in this document are not unique to the CCSS or PARCC but reflect terms and information that should be shared between educators and parents engaged in home/school partnerships that support student learning.

Many of the conversations about the new tests can be technical in nature; however, the New Jersey Department of Education created a model of Parent Academies for Student Success (PASS) that will help parents and educators discuss the CCSS, PARCC and other key issues as they collaborate to ensure that students' best interests are met.

Assessment: The term assessment refers to the wide variety of tools and methods that educators use to evaluate, measure, and document the academic readiness, learning progress, and skill acquisition of students from preschool through college and adulthood. While assessments are often equated with traditional tests, educators use a diverse array of assessment tools and methods to measure everything from a four-year-old's readiness for kindergarten to a twelfth-grade student's comprehension of advanced physics. Just as academic lessons have different functions, assessments are typically designed to measure specific elements of learning.

Assessments aligned with the state's student learning standards: Student learning standards are a basic outline of what students should be learning at each grade level. NJ has two sets of student learning standards – the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and the Core Curriculum Content Standards (CCCS). The CCSS were adopted in 2010 to guide teaching and learning in mathematics and English language arts. The PARCC assessment measures student performance in those two subjects only. In 2014 the second set of standards (CCCS) were re-adopted by the NJ State Board of Education and they guide student learning in all other subject areas.

Assessment System: The PARCC assessment system is a cohesive set of tests that students can take during the school year.. This comprehensive and cohesive system will better inform instruction and provide critical information to students, teachers, and parents about student learning throughout the school year.

21st-Century Skills: These skills include the knowledge and abilities that colleges and employers are seeking in order to grow the economy and solve problems in the workplace. There are many new skills, including flexible problem-solving (for people to solve problems in new and creative ways), collaborative communication (for global thinkers to express themselves effectively and work productively with people all over the world), and digital fluency (for workers to be highly successful using technical and digital media skills in their everyday work).

Accessibility Features: These are embedded supports available to all students during a computer-based test. Allowing students to adjust the background color or contrast of the screen are examples. Educators have to activate specific accessibility features prior to a test, based on a student’s personal needs profile, which is designed to ensure that all students receive appropriate access to tests without the distraction of features they don’t need.

Accommodation: This includes practices and procedures that provide students with disabilities equitable access to instructional materials and assessments. Below is a brief description of each category:

- **Presentation accommodations** change the method or format in which a test is provided to students. These may include the use of Braille, for example.
- **Response accommodations** allow for changes in the way students can answer test questions. Dictation is an example.
- **Timing and scheduling accommodations** include extending the time allowed for testing or allowing a student to take frequent breaks.

Analytic Writing: This is writing that uses evidence, logical integration, and framing of concepts to advance an argument or convey an idea.

Anchor Text: On the ELA/literacy assessment, students are asked to analyze topics presented through several texts. The first one, which introduces the overall topic, is called the anchor text.

Blueprint: Blueprints are a series of documents that together describe the content and structure of a test.

Claim: This is a statement about student performance based on how students respond to test questions. PARCC tests are designed to obtain evidence from students that support valid and reliable claims about the extent to which the students are college- and career- ready, or on track toward that goal, and are making expected academic gains based on the Common Core State Standards. To support such claims, PARCC assessments are designed to measure and report results in multiple categories called master claims and sub-claims. For more information on the master and sub-claims for PARCC’s ELA/literacy and mathematics assessments, see the assessment blueprints and test specifications documents at <http://www.parcconline.org/assessment-blueprints-test-specs>.

College and Career Readiness: This refers to the K-12 preparation that allows students to gain, and build on, the knowledge and skills required to perform well in entry-level college classes and as a valued employees. When students are college- and career- ready, they are able to apply their knowledge and skills to real-world situations.

Complexity: This refers to the level of thought expected for a student to correctly answer a test item. For example, an item or a task requiring students to predict a phenomenon based on data presented in a graph would generally be more complex than an item or task requiring students to simply describe the data presented in the graph.

Construct: The concept, characteristic, or skill a test is designed to measure.

Cut Score: This is a specific point on a score scale that distinguishes between two performance levels. Scores at or above that point are interpreted to mean something different from scores below that point. Students performing below a certain cut score might demonstrate partial command of material in a given subject, while students performing above the cut score might demonstrate mastery.

Device: Digital tools that students may use in daily classroom instruction and to take tests, including, but not limited to, desktop computers, laptops, net books, tablets, and assistive technologies for students requiring accommodations.

Deep Dive: Educators use the term deep dive to mean thinking processes that are academically, intellectually, and personally more challenging than in the past. The learning process of examining a specific idea, topic, or concept and considering it in great detail rather than just a brief review indicates a deep dive into the information. Learning expectations to dive deeper reflect increased rigor and require teaching supports to help students work through more complex ideas and challenging ways to problem-solve. The Common Core State Standards are based upon the principle of “diving deeper” and meeting increased challenges.

Deeper Learning: This is the process of learning for transfer of knowledge, meaning it allows a student to take what’s learned in one situation (classroom) and apply it to another (real-world challenges in college and career experience). A focus on deeper learning allows students to use knowledge in ways that make it meaningful and useful in new situations. By learning deeply, students have procedural knowledge of how, why, and when to apply their knowledge and skills to answer questions and solve problems.

Demonstration of Learning: A Demonstration of Learning (DOL) is an activity or product through which a student demonstrates that he or she has learned the lesson objective. DOLs fall into two categories; 1) those that require the student to demonstrate what he has learned within a subject area, and 2) those that assess more complex objectives or assess multiple learning objectives.

Diagnostic Assessment: Diagnostic assessments are optional tests that are available throughout the year. They are designed to measure students’ strengths and weaknesses. Teachers can use them to inform instructional strategies. The results provide educators with information about what standards students have mastered and which ones may need more attention and focus.

Embedded Support: An embedded support is a tool, scaffold, or preference that is built into the assessment system that can be used by any student at his or her own discretion. Embedded supports are known as universal design test features. They can be accessed onscreen through a toolbar, a menu or a control panel, as needed. For example, students who take the PARCC assessments will have access to a highlight tool, which will enable them to highlight text, as needed, to recall and emphasize certain material.

End-of-Year Assessment (EOY): End-of-year assessments are administered after approximately 90 percent of the school year. The ELA/literacy EOY will focus on reading comprehension. The mathematics EOY will ask students to demonstrate solid understanding of mathematics concepts and demonstrate mathematical fluency.

Evidence(s): Evidence is information gathered from student responses to test questions that supports claims about student performance.

Evidence Statement: Words or phrases that describe student work and support claims about students’ mastery of particular standards. Evidence statements describe what one can point to in a student’s work to show that the student has mastered a specific standard.

Evidence-Based Selected Response (EBSR): The term refers to a type of ELA/literacy test item that asks students to show the evidence in a text that led them to a previous answer.

Evidence-Centered Design (ECD): Evidence-centered design is a systematic approach to test development. The design work begins with developing claims, which are the inferences we want to draw about what students know and can do. Next, evidence statements are developed to describe the things we could point to, highlight or underline in a student work product that would help us prove our claims. Then, tasks are designed to turn the claim into evidence.

Fairness in Testing: Fairness in testing is closely related to test validity. Evaluating fairness in testing requires a close look at a range of evidence. This process includes the evaluation of practical data, but it may also involve consideration of legal, ethical, political, philosophical, and economic issues.

Field Test: A test administration used to examine the quality of items and obtain critical information about testing procedures. The data collected during a field test help inform test development.

Formative Assessment: A formative assessment is a test designed to provide feedback to teachers so they can adjust instruction to improve student learning. Formative assessments typically provide feedback (rather than scores) that focuses on the details of a student’s performance. Formative assessments are commonly contrasted with summative assessments, which are usually single events used to monitor the educational outcomes at the end of the year.

Higher-Order Thinking Skills: This refers to a process which is well above that of simple memorization. It requires that students ask questions of themselves and others in order to learn at a deeper level.

High-Stakes Tests: A high-stakes test is any test used to make important decisions about students, educators, schools, or districts, most commonly used for the purpose of accountability—i.e., the attempt by federal, state, or local government agencies and school administrators to ensure that students are enrolled in effective schools and being taught by effective teachers.

Item: A test item is a statement, question, exercise, or task on a test for which the test taker is to select or construct a response or to perform a task.

Learning Standards: Learning standards are written statements of what students should know and be able to do at every grade level. They may also called “content standards.”

Measures of Academic Progress: Measures that describe individual student growth from one year to the next in relation to learning standards that span multiple grades or in relation to the progress of students’ peers are measures of academic progress.

Model Content Frameworks: The model content frameworks are guiding documents that serve as a bridge between the Common Core State Standards and the PARCC assessments. The frameworks were developed to help design items for the PARCC tests and to support educators’ implementation of the Common Core.

Multiple Choice: The type of assessment question in which students are asked to select the best possible answer out of the choices from a list. For example, when there are four choices to identify the correct answer to a question students will have a 25 percent chance of getting it correct.

Next-Generation Assessments: In general, online assessments are collectively referred to as Next Generation Assessments. A next-generation assessment like PARCC is an online test that requires students to demonstrate what they have learned in mathematics and English language arts by using a computer as a tool. Technology skills are not what are measured, but rather, the computer is the tool by which students indicate their knowledge.

PARCC: This is the acronym for the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers. This is the assessment that New Jersey will use from grades 3 to 11 to determine whether students demonstrate mastery of proficiency in the areas of mathematics and English Language Arts.

- The PARCC assessment is aligned with student learning standards. PARCC scoring is a hybrid approach that includes scoring by both machines and educators. In addition to sections machine-scored for accuracy, PARCC allows students to use free-form responses to standard questions scored by expert scorers.
- PARCC is not like assessments of the past where students shaded circles of multiple-choice questions. In PARCC, a task is well defined and students are asked to create, produce, or actually perform a skill often modeling settings that involve real-world application of knowledge and skills. Tests of the past, such as the NJASK and HSPA, did not provide these features.

Performance-Based Assessment (PBA): For PARCC, the performance-based assessment will be administered approximately 75 percent of the way through the academic study of the grade or course content. Student results will be combined with their results on end-of-year assessments (EOYs) to produce overall PARCC scores in each content area. PBAs in mathematics will focus on reasoning and modeling and include questions that require both short and extended responses. In ELA/literacy, the PBAs will focus on both reading comprehension and writing when analyzing texts.

Performance-Level Descriptors (PLDs):

- **Policy-Level Descriptors or PLDs:** Performance levels are the broad, categorical levels used to report student performance on an assessment. Some assessment systems refer to performance levels as “achievement levels.” The PARCC policy-level PLDs describe what that performance means and it conveys the policy implications for each performance level on the PARCC assessments.
- **Content-Level Descriptors or PLDs:** Content-level PLDs indicate the knowledge, skills and practices that students should be able to demonstrate at each performance level, in each content area (ELA/literacy and mathematics), and at each grade. Content- and grade-level-specific PLDs are designed to inform test item development, the setting of performance-level cut scores, and curriculum and instruction at the local level.

Personalized learning: This is the process of examining where a student is in terms of his/her knowledge, finding his/her strengths and weaknesses and then designing ways in which the student can become successful. If a student struggles with learning material, then the teacher tries to help the student understand the concepts, and if a student already has an understanding of it, the teacher enriches his/her learning.

Personally Identifiable Information: This refers to specific data or information about students collected by schools, districts, government agencies, or organizations and companies working with schools that might reveal the identity of specific students or that could allow someone to indirectly track the identity of students.

Real-World Application: The term is used to describe when something is put to use in a practical way or through an actual experience.

Released Item: PARCC intends to release a large number of items from assessments after each administration. These released items can help teachers and parents better understand the student performance data, as well as inform instruction in the classroom.

Reliability: The degree to which scores for a group of test takers are consistent over repeated applications of a measurement tool, establishes reliability.

Rubric: A rubric is an established set of criteria, including rules, principles and illustrations, that attempt to communicate expectations of quality. PARCC has released a set of rubrics intended to aid educators and item developers. To view these rubrics, visit <http://www.parcconline.org/assessment-blueprints-test-specs>.

Scale Score: A scale score is a numerical score, derived from student responses to test items that summarizes the overall level of performance attained by that student. Scale scores represent what students know and can do, while performance level results indicate the degree to which student performance meets expectations of what they should know and be able to do.

Standardized test: A standardized test is the same test, with the same questions, given in the same manner to all test takers. It is also scored in a consistent or "standard" manner using the same procedures in a predetermined way. Standardized tests make it possible to compare the performance of individual students or groups of students. While different types of tests and assessments may be “standardized” in this way, the term is mainly associated with large-scale tests administered to sizeable populations of students, such as a multiple-choice test given to all the eighth-grade public school students in a particular state. While standardized tests were traditionally presented on paper and completed using pencils, and some still are, they are increasingly being administered on computers connected to online programs.

Standards for Mathematical Practice: The standards for mathematical practice describe ways in which students ought to engage with mathematics through elementary, middle and high school. Examples of these practices include problem-solving, procedural fluency and conceptual understanding. For more information and a list of the standards for mathematical practice, visit <http://www.corestandards.org/Math/Practice>.

Summative Assessment: A summative assessment is designed to measure a student’s knowledge and skills at the end of an instructional period, such as an entire school year or at the conclusion of a course.

Task: This term has subject-specific meanings. In ELA/literacy, a task is a coherent collection of assessment items. Tasks are cohesive because they are connected to a specific reading passage or set of passages. In mathematics, a task is an operational item that may either have a single prompt or multiple prompts. The PARCC mathematics tests contain three types of tasks:

- **Type I** tasks assess concepts, skills and procedures.
- **Type II** tasks assess students’ ability to express mathematical reasoning.
- **Type III** tasks assess modeling and applications.

Technology-Enhanced Constructed Response (TECR): This ELA/literacy item uses technology to capture student comprehension of texts in ways that have been historically difficult to capture using current assessments. Examples include using drag and drop, cut and paste, and highlight text features.

Technology-Enhanced Items (TEIs): TEIs are items administered on a computer and that take advantage of the computer- based environment to present situations and capture responses in ways that are not possible on a paper-based test.

Universal Design for Assessment: Describes a framework for curriculum design, instructional processes and tests that provide all students with equal opportunities to learn and demonstrate their knowledge and skills. The purpose is to offer tests to as many children as possible and minimize the need for individualized design or accommodations. Universal design builds flexibility into curricula and tests at the development stage, which enhances a teacher’s ability to make adjustments for different learners during classroom instruction. Using these principles, test developers consider the full range of students being tested and develop items, tasks and prompts that measure learning for the greatest number of students without the need for accommodation, if possible.

Validity: The degree to which evidence and theory support specific interpretations of test scores, establishing validity.

Vertical Scale: This is a single, one-dimensional scale that allows for the monitoring and tracking of student growth and progress across grades over time. Vertical scaling links tests of increasing difficulty along a learning continuum, so that educators can get an accurate measurement of a student’s gains over time.

PASS 2 documents and partnership supports are intended to complement information about the New Jersey Department of Education’s Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career (PARCC) Assessments and provide resources, materials, and opportunities for parents and educators to work together in the best interest of New Jersey students.

*For information on the NJDOE PASS model, the PASS #1 theme of **Student Learning with the Common Core State Standards** or the PASS #2 theme of **Measure What Matters: Assessing Student Learning and PARCC** go to: <http://www.state.nj.us/education/sca/toolkit/>. Send questions to: informccss@doe.state.nj.us.*