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PARCC RELEASE OF ASSESSMENT ADMINISTRATION CAPACITY PLANNING TOOL MARCH 2013

COMMUNICATIONS MEMO FOR STATE EDUCATION AGENCIES

To: PARCC Governing Board Members, State Leads, and Public Information Officers

From: Achieve

Purpose

As you share information with the public about the Assessment Administration Capacity
Planning Tool, this memo will provide details to support you in communicating with your key
stakeholders as schools and districts use the tool to prepare for computer-based administration
of PARCC in 2014–15.

A New Vision of Assessment

- The PARCC assessments in English Language Arts (ELA)/Literacy and Mathematics will address a long-standing 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 PARCC assessments are being carefully crafted to accomplish this important goal. They will enable teachers, schools, students and parents to gain important insights into how well critical knowledge, skills and abilities essential for young people to thrive in college and careers are being mastered.
- Computer-based assessments have many advantages over pencil-and-paper tests. They are innovative; efficient; engaging; and produce timely, useful data that can help inform instruction. In a globally competitive era, 21st-century technology ought to be a right for all students, not an option for some of them.

What PARCC is releasing

- PARCC is releasing two items to help schools and districts prepare for the new assessments:
 - The Assessment Administration Capacity Planning Tool, a spreadsheet-based tool that will support school budgeting and planning decisions
 - A related guidance memo that also will help schools and districts plan for the new tests

Assessment Administration Capacity Planning Tool

- Districts and schools have said that they would like a tool like this to help prepare for the PARCC assessments.
- They can use this spreadsheet tool by plugging in their own data about devices, bandwidth, and school capacity to generate information about whether they are ready to administer the PARCC tests in ELA/literacy and math in 2014–15 or whether they have to make new device purchases or adjustments.
- The tool lays out key variables about the PARCC assessments that schools should take into consideration as they plan for the new tests, including:
 - The maximum length of testing windows, or the maximum number of days over which testing can take place
 - The estimated time it will take the average student to complete each component of the assessment



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- Available testing space in schools
- o Number of computer devices available for assessment
- Ratio of students to devices
- Available bandwidth, or speed and level of access a school has to the Internet
- Schools will be able to use computers and devices for instructional purposes during the school
 year as well as during the administration of the tests, if they plan accordingly and have enough
 devices.
- While planning and purchasing may be required up front when schools switch to these new 21st century assessments, computer-based testing should yield efficiencies in staff time and resources. They also are high-quality assessments that will produce timely data for students, teachers, and parents. That timely and relevant data will inform and improve teaching and learning.
- How this tool is different from previous PARCC guidance:
 - Last year, PARCC released information on the minimum specifications devices must meet to be usable for the PARCC tests. That information will continue to be updated every six months based on data from the field.
 - PARCC has also released a different tool, called a technology readiness tool, which takes a periodic inventory of district hardware, software and bandwidth levels. But, unlike what we're releasing now, that doesn't allow schools and districts to model different scenarios, so schools can see the varying ways in which they can administer the computer-based tests.

Accompanying Guidance About How the Assessments Will Work

- The PARCC assessments are replacing current state summative tests in grades 3–11 in ELA/literacy and math. They are not being given in addition to the old tests. So in many states, the testing time will look somewhat similar to what is in place now.
- Unlike most current state assessments, there are two components of the PARCC Summative Assessment that will contribute to a student's overall score.
 - The first is a performance-based assessment, which is administered after about threefourths of the school year is completed and requires students to apply their knowledge to write, solve complex problems, and produce a product.
 - The second component is the end-of-year assessment, which is administered after about 90 percent of instructional days and requires students to demonstrate their acquired knowledge and skills by responding to computer-scored questions.

Information about Estimated Testing Times

- PARCC also is releasing guidance to states about estimated time on task for students. PARCC estimates that students will spend approximately:
 - 8 hours to complete all the sessions, or timed components, of the performance-based and end-of-year assessments in ELA/literacy and math annually in 3rd grade
 - Just over 9 hours to assess those subjects in grades 4–5
 - A little less than 9 ½ hours in middle school
 - o A little more than 9 ½ hours in high school
- These times refer to on-task time, or the time it will take most students to complete the PARCC summative tests in both content areas.



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- While it is anticipated that most students will complete the tests within these estimated times, schools will be asked to schedule a limited amount of additional time to ensure that students who work at slower rates can complete the assessments.
- Of course, schools also will continue to make special accommodations for children with disabilities who have specific requirements and arrangements established.
- For some states, the PARCC testing time will add up to more assessment hours than they currently have in place. But for other states, this will result in the same or less testing time.
- The PARCC assessments will test writing skills at every grade level, which most current state
 assessments do not test, and will assess critical thinking and problem-solving skills in an in-depth
 manner.
- The new tests also will be linked to college and career readiness standards so students and parents will have data about whether students are on track for success in college-level coursework or need extra help.

Guidance on Testing Windows

- Schools and districts will have a maximum of two four-week windows to complete the administration of the performance-based and end-of-year tests (one window per component).
 - This is the maximum number of days in which schools and districts can administer the tests.
 - States, districts or schools can choose to administer the tests in a shorter time span if they have sufficient capacity to do that, and many are expected to do so.
- The new capacity planning tool will help schools figure out how many days they will need to
 administer the tests given their current capacity and how they may reduce that number by
 increasing the number of devices or the way devices are set up in the school building.

Guidance on Device Capacity

- PARCC is issuing some rule-of-thumb advice for schools to consider so they can ensure they can
 get the testing done within those 20-day windows.
 - Schools with up to three tested grades should consider having a ratio of at least one device for every two students for the largest tested grade.
 - A school that has six tested grades, such as a K–8 school, should consider having one device per student in the largest tested grade.

How PARCC is different

- PARCC assessments are tests worth taking. They include texts worth reading and problems worth solving.
- The new assessments are designed to measure the full range of knowledge and skills students need to be career and college ready or on track toward that goal.
- The PARCC assessments will measure the full range of student performance, including the
 performance of high- and low-achieving students. Too often, now, tests don't adequately
 measure the skills and knowledge of students working significantly beyond or behind their
 grade level.
- PARCC assessments are more comprehensive than current state tests. They look much deeper at student writing abilities and critical-thinking skills, for example.
 - In some instances, states will be adding a writing component that isn't currently included in state tests.



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- o In math, students will have to solve complex problems, show their work, and demonstrate how they solved the problem.
- Unlike pencil-and-paper bubble tests, these new assessments will more closely resemble high-quality classroom work.
- PARCC tests will yield results in a timely manner rather than requiring students and teachers
 to wait months or well into the next school year for results. That isn't very helpful to
 educators or students.
- The new assessments will improve instruction and accountability in our schools by helping school leaders and policymakers have better data about what students know and can do.
- The assessments will be innovative in design and more engaging for students.
- We have to measure what children are learning, but we have to do it in a meaningful way.

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