

The PARCC test is a welcome change [Commentary]

Maryland's new state assessment is vastly superior to the old MSA test

April 23, 2014 | By Amanda Hughes

While no standardized test can ever truly measure all that a child has learned or can do, the new Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessment represents a vast improvement over the Maryland School Assessments (MSA). Both teachers and students are ready for this welcome shift.

As a middle school English teacher in Baltimore County, I participated in the PARCC English Language Arts field test this year. Students were adequately prepared for the PARCC assessment. All year, the English teachers have been delivering curriculum that is fully aligned with Common Core and designed to prepare students to be successful on PARCC. In addition, students participating in the field test completed a PARCC tutorial, which allowed them to familiarize themselves with the format of the test and the resources available to them. Teachers involved in the field testing were fully trained on how to administer the test. The field test allows test developers to make changes and receive feedback before PARCC is fully implemented next year.

The test itself is a more authentic measure of student achievement. Each multiple choice question on PARCC has two parts – one which requires students to select an answer, similar to MSA, and a second which requires students to select the evidence that supports their answer choice. This addition of a second part helps measure students' thought processes rather than their ability to simply fill in the correct bubble, regardless of whether or not they know why that answer is correct. In addition, the PARCC assessment includes interactive technology items which require students to actively manipulate text, such as dragging and dropping details to form a coherent summary. These tasks demand more critical thinking than the traditional multiple choice questions.

The MSA did not include much writing. PARCC also involves extended written responses, including questions requiring synthesis and narrative writing. Students are no longer confined to a small box in which they must develop an answer; the answer box on PARCC has no limit. This allows students to demonstrate more sophisticated thinking and writing than was ever allowed on MSA.

In addition to the question types, PARCC makes several resources available to students on the computer based test, such as a highlighting tool, incorrect answer strikeout, a glossary of terms, and a read aloud function. In today's world where students have almost unlimited access to resources such as these in their daily lives, it does not make sense to deny them access to these aids in a testing environment. In fact, the ability to use such resources appropriately is an important skill that standardized tests should measure. Again, PARCC improves on MSA, which did not offer all resources to students unless they were enrolled in a special education or ESOL program.

The more rigorous nature of PARCC will mean that results will not be comparable to those of the MSA. The percentage of students scoring in the proficient range on PARCC is likely to be lower at the outset of implementation.

It is my hope that this does not cause people to give up on the test or write off the Common Core standards. Ultimately, this test is a more authentic assessment of student learning which requires critical thinking, allows for divergent thought processes, and provides students with appropriate resources.

While students are ready to show what they know, we need to give students and teachers time to rise to these expectations. It is a step in the right direction for our education system, and this teacher welcomes the change with open arms.

Amanda Hughes is an English Language Arts(ELA) teacher at Lansdowne Middle school.

http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2014-04-23/news/bs-ed-parcc-testing-20140423_1_maryland-school-assessments-test-parcc-assessment

Guest Column: Maryland's new tests: The next step in measuring student learning

By KRISTEN ADDLEMAN | The writer is a reading teacher at Marley Elementary School in Glen Burnie.

What an exciting time for education! As a teacher with a deep passion for teaching and learning, I truly believe Maryland's College and Career-Ready Standards, built on the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), will ensure our students are ready for success after high school. The Standards, being implemented this year throughout the State, establish clear, consistent guidelines for what every student should know and be able to do in math and English language arts from kindergarten through 12th grade. As a result of these new standards, a group of states have come together through a shared commitment to develop an assessment system that accurately measures college and career readiness.

The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) is a major topic of conversation for anyone with an investment in the educational system. Every newspaper and website has reported their version and highlighted the positives and negatives to this new assessment. Since field-testing of the PARCC has begun, many of the misconceptions and questions circulating through the public are being clarified and answered. As a reading specialist and a parent of school-aged children, the direction of education is extremely important to me. Having the opportunity to be trained and administer the PARCC Field Assessment was a priority for that reason.

Preparations for the PARCC Field Test began in each Anne Arundel County public school building in January when homeroom classes were randomly selected to participate. Throughout the months of January and February, teachers, students, and administrators have been preparing for this field test "practice" assessment. This included the school computer tech that worked very hard to install the necessary systems and test our network capabilities. Updates and new information became available as testing ensued to further promote a smooth administration. Any issues were solved and all questions and the PARCC testing were answered quickly.

Every year, I see students entering elementary school with major proficiencies in technology. Our students need a new assessment to test them the way their brain works, with movement, pictures, and even typing. It is our responsibility to give that to them!

Once I administered the PARCC Field Test and witnessed the students manipulating the assessment and associated tools, my anxiousness about their capabilities of typing proficiently, reading and scrolling through text, and manipulating the online tools were relieved. The students had no problems and knew exactly what they were doing! They were actually motivated and excited to take the assessment on the computer. As part of the field assessment, students were asked a few survey questions at the conclusion of the assessment, including if they preferred the computer-based assessment over the traditional paper and pencil format. Every Marley Elementary student emphatically stated they preferred the computerized format.

The PARCC Field Test is doing exactly what it was created to do - test the test. Educational stakeholders hold some concerns of the feasibility of a computer-based assessment. Anne-Arundel County Schools implemented a paper and pencil format and a computer format so the PARCC consortium and test vendors have as much information necessary to guide them as states fully implement the PARCC assessment to all third through eighth grade students in the upcoming school year.

Kristin Addleman, NBCT, Anne Arundel County Reading Teacher, Marley Elementary School

http://www.capitalgazette.com/opinion/columnists/guest/guest-column-maryland-s-new-tests-the-next-step-in/article_999bfaec-2916-5215-bd09-4e74e745322f.html?mode=jgm



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Teachers to begin field-testing the new test

To the Editor: Cumberland Times-News

During the past three school years, educators have been making the transition to the full implementation of Common Core set to take place in 2014-2015. This spring, randomly selected classes in schools throughout Maryland will be field testing the new Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessments as the next step in this process.

The PARCC assessments represent the next generation of standardized testing which will be used to show that our students are progressing towards college and career readiness. These tests, which are more rigorous than the MSA and HSA tests they will be replacing, require students to demonstrate their learning beyond the recall of facts and simple procedures. The PARCC assessments will require students to show how they will apply their skills to solve a variety of real-world problems requiring the types of critical thinking, disciplinary literacy, computer literacy, and communication skills that higher education and the workforce demand.

The field testing of the PARCC assessments is an essential component of establishing the validity and reliability of these tests. Data collected from the field tests will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the test to measure what it is designed to measure. The students who are taking the field test will effectively be "testing the test" so that the test developers can identify and correct flaws in the assessment before it counts for all students in the future.

In addition to the way that student learning is assessed, the method by which the PARCC assessment is given also reflects the needs of a technology-driven society. Unlike the MSA and HSA, the PARCC assessments are designed to incorporate interactive technology. Students will use a variety of computer skills such as word processors, drag and drop, and drop down menus to answer questions as they work through the test.

While there still exists some uncertainty about what the PARCC assessments will look like and how our students will perform on them, we are ready to see the tests that we have been hearing about for three years. Local test coordinators and teachers have received training on administering the tests. Students in the classes selected to take the field tests have been practicing with prototype questions for some time now. The teachers administering the field tests will be among the first in the state to see a full PARCC assessment and the insight they gain will be invaluable to other teachers who will be giving the assessments in future years. Information gathered from these field tests will enable local boards of education to further refine the curriculum to insure that future students are prepared to be successful on this assessment.

It took some time for students, parents, and teachers to become comfortable with the format of the MSA and HSA tests. It will take some time to adjust to the demands of the PARCC assessments as well. Teachers recognize that for our students to be college and career ready at graduation, we must change the way we teach and assess students. Meeting the standards of Common Core as assessed by PARCC will put our students well on their way toward meeting that goal.

Steve Thompson

Mathematics Teacher

Fort Hill High School

<http://www.times-news.com/letters2/x1316960360/Teachers-to-begin-field-testing-the-new-test>