



## Bureau Brief



### Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC)

The **Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC)** is a consortium of 18 states working together to create computer-based English and math assessments for 3<sup>rd</sup> through 11<sup>th</sup> grade students that align with Common Core State Standards (CCSS). In September 2010, the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) awarded the PARCC consortium a four-year, \$186 million dollar grant for winning the Race to the Top assessment competition. USDOE also gave PARCC \$15.87 million dollars in supplemental funding to help participating states transition to CCSS and PARCC assessments. Additionally, the USDOE's Office of Special Education Programs funded the development of alternate assessments for students with disabilities.

As a governing member in PARCC, Arkansas has a role in decision and policy making regarding development, cost, and implementation of PARCC assessments. These new assessments are being designed to encourage the use of technology, improve student academic tracking, and ensure students are ready for a career or college.

#### Test Requirements

Currently, all Arkansas K-12 students are required to participate in state assessments. For school accountability purposes under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Arkansas students are assessed using the Benchmark Exams in literacy and math (grades 3-8) and in science (5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grades) and the End-of Course (EOC) exams in Algebra I, Biology, Geometry, and 11<sup>th</sup> grade literacy.

In 2014-15, PARCC assessments will replace the current tests for 3<sup>rd</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> grade students, and add several new assessments. The PARCC assessments will include a literacy exam for 9<sup>th</sup> and

10<sup>th</sup> grade students and an EOC assessment for Algebra II. Currently, 9<sup>th</sup> graders take the Iowa Basic Skills test (which is not counted for school accountability purposes), but this test will be discontinued.

PARCC assessments will not replace the Benchmark science exams for 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade students because new science standards were not part of the Common Core. However new science standards, known as the Next Generation Science Standards, are in development through a 26-state collaborative, of which Arkansas is a partner. These states will decide whether to create new tests aligned to the standards.

The PARCC assessments also will not include an alternate assessment for the small percentage of students with disabilities who cannot take the traditional assessment. However, a 25-state consortium called the National Center and State Collaborative is developing alternate assessments for students with significant cognitive disabilities. Arkansas is an affiliate in the consortium.

#### Funding and Costs

The state currently contracts with Minnesota-based Questar Assessment, Inc. for its assessments. For 2013-14, the state has contracted to spend \$8.9 million for Benchmark exams, about \$6.1 million for End-of-Course exams, and about \$1.9 million for alternate assessments. Currently Arkansas pays about \$34 per student for its assessments.

In July 2013, PARCC announced the online assessments would cost \$29.50 per student. Although a lower per-student cost could result in some cost savings, the addition of the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade English language arts exams and the Algebra II End-of-Course exams will

likely mean that total test spending will not significantly change. Additional costs associated with PARCC beyond what the state currently pays include:

- PARCC consortium membership costs, which include broader project management services, collaboration with other states, research support, and technology platform hosting;
- Online resource center for educators;
- Speaking and listening assessments for the 2015-16 school year (PARCC is currently developing tests to assess students' speaking and listening communication skills); and
- Increased need for more technology and bandwidth.

Unlike the state's current paper and pencil tests, students will take PARCC tests online. Although PARCC offers a paper version, ADE intends to have every student take the test online except those students whose special education plan calls for a paper and pencil version. To accommodate full-scale PARCC assessment implementation in 2014-15, most school districts will need to increase the number of testing devices and bandwidth. Last spring, the Arkansas Department of Information Systems estimated that broadband expansion could cost between \$17 million and \$765 million dollars. In July, state business and education leaders convened in two groups to discuss the broadband expansion issue. One is a business-focused group called Fast Access for Students, Teachers, and Economic Results (FASTER), while the other is an education group known as the Quality Digital Learning Study committee (QDLS). A report released this month from FASTER's Engineering and Infrastructure Task Force noted that specific cost estimates are not yet available.