



PARCC Accessibility Features and Accommodations Manual: First Edition
Frequently Asked Questions
July 2013

1. What is included in the first edition of the *PARCC Accessibility Features and Accommodations Manual*, and what information is the manual designed to provide?

The first edition of the *PARCC Accessibility Features and Accommodations Manual* is a comprehensive policy document that provides guidance to districts and decision-making teams to ensure that the PARCC Mid-Year, Performance-Based, and End-of-Year Assessments provide valid results for all participating students.

The majority of the proposed accommodations policies are currently in use across PARCC states. What is different from many current state accommodations manuals, however, is that the PARCC manual includes not only proposed participation and accommodations policies for students with disabilities and English learners, but also information about tools that will be provided through PARCC's computer-delivered assessments for *all* students to optimize their performance on the assessments. By assessing students on computer devices, PARCC states will now have the opportunity to provide *all* students with tools they frequently use in the classroom and daily life (e.g., highlighters and enlarged font) that were once provided only as accommodations for students with disabilities and English learners.

2. Why did PARCC states develop a common accessibility features and accommodations manual?

When PARCC states came together to form the consortium in 2010, they each signed a Memorandum of Understanding in which they committed to develop and implement common policies and procedures for administration of the assessments, including common participation policies and accommodations policies for students with disabilities and English learners. These common participation and accommodations policies are important to establish equitable access as well as comparability of results for all students, schools, districts and states in the PARCC consortium.

3. What are accommodations, and who is eligible to receive them?

It is important to ensure that performance in the classroom and on the assessment is influenced as little as possible by a student's disability or linguistic/cultural characteristics that are unrelated to the content being assessed.

For PARCC assessments, accommodations are adjustments to the testing situation, test format, or test administration that provide equitable access during assessments for students with

disabilities, students who are English learners, and students with disabilities who are also English learners. To the extent possible, accommodations:

- Provide equitable access during instruction and assessments;
- Mitigate the effects of a student’s disability;
- Do not reduce learning or achievement expectations;
- Do not change the construct being assessed; and
- Do not compromise the integrity or validity of the assessment; and
- Should already be familiar to the student.

Accommodations are intended to reduce or even eliminate the effects of a student’s disability and/or English language proficiency level; however, **accommodations do not reduce learning expectations.**

To the extent possible, accommodations adhere to the following principles:

- Accommodations enable students to participate more fully in instruction and assessments and to demonstrate their knowledge and skills.
- Accommodations selection should be based upon individual student needs and not upon a category of disability, English language proficiency alone, level of instruction, amount of time spent in a general classroom, program setting, or availability of staff.
- Accommodations should be based on a documented need in the instruction/assessment setting and should not be provided for the purpose of giving the student an enhancement that could be viewed as an unfair advantage.
- Accommodations for students with disabilities should be described and documented in the student’s appropriate plan (i.e., either the Individualized Education Program (IEP) or Section 504 plan).
- Accommodations for English learners should be described and documented in writing.
- Students who are both English learners and students with disabilities may qualify for students with disabilities and English learner accommodations, and should have all accommodations listed in an IEP/Section 504 plan and other documentation deemed appropriate.
- Accommodations should be implemented during daily instruction as soon as possible after completion and/or approval of the appropriate plan.
- Accommodations should not be introduced for the first time during the testing of a student.
- Accommodations should be monitored for effectiveness.
- Accommodations used for instruction should also be used, if allowable, on district and state assessments.

4. What are “accessibility features,” and who is eligible to receive them?

On PARCC computer-delivered assessments, *accessibility features* are tools or preferences that are either built into the assessment system or provided externally by test administrators. Accessibility features can be used by *any* student taking the PARCC assessments (i.e., students with or without disabilities, gifted students, English learners, and English learners with disabilities). Since accessibility features are intended for *all* students, they are not classified as accommodations. Students should be exposed to the selected features prior to testing, and

should have the opportunity to select and practice using them. Accessibility features are intended to benefit a wide range of students, and are available to any student at his or her discretion during testing. Practice tests with supports will be made available for teacher and student use throughout the year.

Accessibility Features Identified in Advance

A relatively small number of students may require *additional* accessibility features that are based on their specific needs, but are not required by the vast majority of students (e.g., changing the background or font color onscreen, or text-to-speech for the math assessment). The additional onscreen controls needed for these features might distract other students or interfere with other features or accommodations, and therefore must be “turned on” for a particular student during the test registration process prior to testing. Additional accessibility features, therefore, must be identified ahead of time by students, teachers, and/or parents, whichever provides the greatest benefit to the student. Students may decide, without consequence, whether to actually use the support. Recent research¹ suggests that providing too many onscreen tools may lead to ineffective use of the tools provided and have an impact on a student’s test performance. Students should practice using all accessibility features before testing occurs, either in a classroom setting or in a real world application.

5. Who selects accommodations and accessibility features for students?

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

IEP and Section 504 plan team members are responsible for selecting accommodations for both instruction and assessment. To ensure that students with disabilities are engaged in standards-based instruction and assessments, all IEP/504 team members should be knowledgeable about the Common Core State Standards, the PARCC assessments, and the school district’s aligned curricula.

Effective decision-making on the provision of appropriate accommodations begins with gathering and reviewing information about the student’s present level of academic achievement, functional performance in relation to the CCSS and the supports the student requires during instruction and classroom assessment. The selection of accommodations is intended to “level the playing field” for a student with a disability so that he or she can participate more equitably in the general education curriculum and the PARCC assessments. Team meetings should include discussions about providing the student with equal learning opportunities, and identifying practices and approaches intended to help the student overcome learning obstacles during instruction and assessment.

The first edition of the *PARCC Accessibility Features and Accommodations Manual* outlines accommodations that, when used appropriately during the PARCC assessments, will result in a more valid and reliable score. For more detailed information, please see Section 5 of the manual.

Accommodations for English Learners

Decisions about testing accommodations for English learners should be made by a group of individuals in a school/district (e.g., in some states, an English learner team) who are familiar with the student and his or her language needs in the classroom. These decisions should be

¹ For more information, please see page 19 of the manual.

based on the student’s individual needs and English proficiency level. These educators are responsible for documenting accommodations decisions for the student in writing.

Determining appropriate linguistic support for English learners during routine classroom instruction and assessment is facilitated by gathering and reviewing information about the student and the student’s level of performance in relation to district and state academic standards. The process of determining the amount and types of instructional and assessment support involves attempts by local educators to “level the playing field” for the student so he or she can participate in the general education curriculum and assessments.

Effective decision-making regarding the provision of appropriate test accommodations for an English learner student by the team of educators begins well before the day of the assessment. Once eligibility for accommodations has been established, the selection of accommodations should be based on the guidance provided in Section 5 of the manual.

Accommodations for English Learners with Disabilities

Students classified as English learners who also have a disability are eligible to receive **both** English learner accommodations **and** accommodations for students with disabilities on the PARCC assessments. The IEP or 504 plan team should collaborate with school English learner (i.e., language) staff and evaluation professionals to determine the English language development needs of an English learner with an identified disability. An English learner with a disability that affects his/her language acquisition may need support from staff who provide both language services and special education.

Accessibility Features for All Participating Students

In order to individualize the testing experience, and enhance access to the PARCC assessments for all students, each student’s testing needs will be included in a Personal Needs Profile (PNP) embedded within the technology platform. The PNP also includes the student’s demographic information, the pre-selected accessibility features that are needed, and accommodations (if needed).

The PNP should be based on observations and stated preferences by the student or parent/guardian on a student’s testing needs that have been found to increase access during instruction and assessment. Observations based on a student’s interaction with the online testing platform can be made through the practice tests. A student’s testing needs should be reviewed at least annually, and revised as appropriate, to reflect current education-related needs or preferences.

Who creates the PNP for a student?

- For *students with disabilities*, the IEP or 504 team will identify the accessibility supports in the PNP.
- For *English learners*, the educators responsible for selecting accommodations (or an English learner team, if available) will identify the accessibility supports in the PNP for the student.
- For *English learners with disabilities*, the IEP or 504 team (which includes an adult familiar with the language needs of the student) will make PNP decisions.
- For students *without* disabilities who are *not* English learners, but have a specific need, PNP decisions will be made by an informal team, which may include the:
 - Student (as appropriate)
 - Parent/guardian

- Student's primary educator in the subject of the assessment

6. Will PARCC share additional guidance around implementation of the policies in the first edition of the manual?

The first edition of the *PARCC Accessibility Features and Accommodations Manual* is primarily a policy document and therefore, full administrative guidance is not included. In fall 2013, PARCC states and key stakeholders will include several appendices to the manual designed to support states and districts in the implementation of the policies.

Additional information on administering the PARCC assessments will also be included in the *PARCC Test Administration Manual* and in the *PARCC Style Guide*. To further support member states, PARCC will be developing an online professional development module on the accessibility features and accommodations policies.

PARCC states are presently meeting with state and national experts in assistive technology to ensure both that the online assessment delivery platform is compatible with the wide range of assistive technology used by students, and that the guidelines developed are comprehensive and based on the most current research and effective practices. Full guidelines on assistive technology for PARCC assessments will be released in fall 2013.

7. What if my student/child needs to use an accommodation on the PARCC assessments not listed in the first edition of the *PARCC Accessibility Features and Accommodations Manual*?

In the case of unique situations in which a student may require an accommodation not included in the manual, PARCC states will review requests for additional accommodations not listed in the manual on an individual basis and will provide approval after determining whether the accommodation would result in a valid score for the student.

8. Will PARCC allow accommodations for students who need to take a paper-and-pencil test, rather than a computer-delivered test?

The expectation is that students will take the PARCC assessments on a computer. Among many other advantages, computer-based testing will be engaging for students, result in lower costs, and ultimately allow for faster scoring and reporting of results. However, the PARCC assessments will be available in a paper-and-pencil format for students with disabilities whose IEP or 504 plans require this format, and for schools that have gained approval for paper-and-pencil-based testing from their State Educational Agency (SEA). An appendix is being developed to provide accommodations policy guidance for students who will need to test via paper and pencil.

9. Will PARCC allow translations of the assessments in languages other than English?

The policy regarding the translation of PARCC assessments into languages other than English is still being discussed among PARCC states. Many state laws, regulations, and/or policies exist that may either require or prohibit translations of state assessments. PARCC states will convene in early fall 2013 to agree upon a consortium-wide policy on the issue of test translation.

10. What was the process PARCC used to develop the first edition of the manual?

Together, the PARCC states reviewed the accommodations policies among member states and synthesized the current research on accommodations for students with disabilities, English learners, and English learners with disabilities. They carefully analyzed the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and the claims (i.e., what knowledge and skills will be tested) on the PARCC Performance-Based and End-of-Year assessment components in both mathematics and English language arts/literacy.

Drafts of the *PARCC Accessibility Features and Accommodations Manual* were developed and reviewed over the past year by the following groups of PARCC stakeholders:

- State experts serving on the PARCC Accessibility, Accommodations and Fairness Operational Working Group;
- K-12 PARCC State Leads;
- Additional state agency experts (including special education, English learner, and content area experts);
- External experts, including representatives from the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO), and the PARCC Technical Working Groups on Equity, English Learners, and Students with Disabilities;
- National advocacy groups for students with disabilities, English learners, and equity and fairness; and
- Staff from PARCC’s project management partner Achieve, Inc.

Although the development of the manual was led by the PARCC state representatives comprising the Accessibility, Accommodations, and Fairness Operational Working Group, additional input was solicited from the PARCC Educator Leader Cadres; educators and community members through two public comment periods; national experts in assessment and instruction for special populations; and advocacy organizations/national stakeholders through briefings and meetings.

11. How did PARCC respond to the public comments received through the previous public releases of the manual throughout 2013?

PARCC released accessibility and accommodations policies for public comment on three separate occasions over the course of five months. Reviews included the following:

- Reading access and calculator accommodations (January 2013)
- Writing access accommodations (February 2013)
- Full draft *PARCC Accessibility Features and Accommodations Manual* (April–May 2013)

During the three public review periods, PARCC received more than 4,000 individual survey responses and approximately 40 pieces of written feedback from national organizations representing students with disabilities, English learners, and equitable access. Each piece of feedback was read and reviewed carefully by the state representatives on the PARCC Accessibility, Accommodations, and Fairness Operational Working Group, as well as its supporting project management team at Achieve, Inc. In addition, as part of their commitment to providing technical assistance to states, the staff at the National Center on Educational

Outcomes (NCEO) reviewed and synthesized the public comment data and provided analysis and feedback to PARCC, and considerations to enhance and improve the manual for future release.

The major themes and considerations from the public comment periods on the manual were reviewed by the groups of stakeholders involved in the development of the manual. See Question 10 for the full list.

Throughout the development process, PARCC conducted several dozen small group and one-to-one meetings with national and state organizations that had provided written feedback during the comment periods. These conversations helped to clarify feedback, address suggested revisions to the draft policies, and create opportunities for ongoing dialogue between the PARCC states and these organizations.

For more information on the themes from the feedback, please refer to slides 22-23 in the “PARCC Accessibility Features and Accommodations Manual Release PowerPoint” document found on www.parcconline.org.

The first edition of the *PARCC Accessibility Features and Accommodations Manual* reflects changes made over the past five months based on a synthesis of public comments, stakeholder meetings, additional review of current research, and working group analyses.

12. Whom should I contact if I have questions about computer-delivered assessments and technology readiness?

Please contact your state’s Technology Readiness Coordinator for more information about your state’s transition plan to computer-delivered assessments. Additional guidance on technology and the Assessment Administration Capacity Planning Tool can be found on the PARCC website at <http://www.parcconline.org/technology> and <http://www.parcconline.org/assessment-administration-guidance>.