Expanding Access

Accessibility Features and Accommodations for Students with Disabilities in PARCC Assessments—A Teacher's Guide

In Brief

During the 2014–2015 school year, the new computer-based PARCC state assessments, which measure students' mastery of Common Core State Standards in mathematics and English language arts/literacy in Grades 3 through 11, will be implemented. To provide equitable access to the online PARCC assessments (Performance-Based, Midyear, and End-of-Year), PARCC has embedded accessibility features for all students and developed other accessibility features that educators can provide for individual students as needed.

PARCC also has identified accommodations that students with disabilities and students who are English learners may require. To support educators in selecting, providing, and evaluating accessibility features and accommodations, PARCC has developed a policy document, the *PARCC Accessibility Features and Accommodations Manual*.

This brief takes a look at what's inside the *PARCC Accessibility Features and Accommodations Manual*, with a focus on how teachers can use the information to enhance the participation of students with disabilities in the new PARCC assessments.

Helping Students with Disabilities Show What They Know and Are Able to Do

All students, including students with disabilities, are required to participate in statewide assessments and have their assessment results included in the state's accountability system. Unless a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) team determines that the student will participate in an alternate assessment, he or she will participate in the new PARCC assessments in English language arts/literacy (ELA/L) and mathematics.

For students with disabilities, PARCC has identified accommodations specific to the PARCC assessment that IEP and Section 504 teams can choose from when deciding if a student requires support in accessing the test. How are accessibility features and accommodations handled in the new computer-delivered PARCC assessments? How are they different from what students with disabilities use on paper-and-pencil tests?

To answer these questions, let's take a look at the PARCC Accessibility System. [*Note*: Although PARCC allows for a paper-and-pencil version if a student's IEP or Section 504 plan requires it as an accommodation, the following discussion will focus only on accessibility features and accommodations relevant to the online assessments.]

From the Start: A Focus on Accessibility

Expanding student access, increasing student participation, providing equitable opportunities for students to show what they know and are able to do—these goals are at the core of the PARCC Accessibility System and accessibility policies described in detail in the *PARCC Accessibility Features and Accommodations Manual*. How are the PARCC assessments more accessible?

From the beginning, PARCC used the ideas of universal design to build its assessments. Universal design began in the field of architecture to design the world around us in a way that benefits a diverse group of people. For example, architects plan and design structures to be more accessible before they are built—ramps, curb cuts, braille elevator buttons, etc.—so more people can have access to their environment.

In the PARCC assessments, all students can use features that help them show what they know and are able to do. However, in the PARCC Accessibility System (see graphic on page 2), there are different levels of support built into the PARCC assessments that make it so that more students can participate equitably. Let's take a closer look at each level of support.

PARCC

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Features for All Students

PARCC accessibility features for all students embrace universal design principles by offering an array of tools, supports, scaffolds, and preferences. Students can choose to activate these on specific test items. They are embedded in the delivery platform or test administration and are typical of tools found in classrooms and used in everyday life. Examples include:

- Using a highlighter tool to shade text on the screen.
- Having test directions read aloud and repeated as needed.
- Enlarging text on the computer screen to see words, pictures, and details more clearly.
- Using a pop-up glossary.
- Using a spell checker while writing.
- Writing and editing notes on an on screen notepad.
- Using writing tools, such as copy, cut, paste, bold, and underline.
- Flagging items that they want to come back to later.
- Raising and lowering the volume—called audio amplification—on their headphones during the test.
- Crossing out answers for multiple choice items.

Other accessibility features that are not embedded in the computer platform include:

- Allowing students to use headphones or noise buffers to filter external noise.
- Redirecting the student's attention to the test.
- Providing blank paper for the student to organize responses.
- Clarifying general administration questions.

Features for All Students

Accessibility Features
Identified in Advance

Accommodations*

* For students with disabilities, English learners, and English learners with disabilities

The PARCC Accessibility System

Accessibility Features Identified in Advance

Additional accessibility features also are available to all students based on their individual needs. Because having too many features on the screen at the same time may confuse or distract some students, an adult must identify these in advance for a particular student. These features are written in students' IEPs, 504 plans, or listed on a sheet that shows what the students need on the PARCC assessments. Students do not have to use the selected features. Examples of accessibility features identified in advance include:

- Masking, which allows students to cover answer options.
- Adjusting the color contrast of the background or print.
- Using the line reader tool to move text up and down on screen.
- Using text-to-speech for the mathematics assessments, which allows students to hear the test read aloud through headphones.
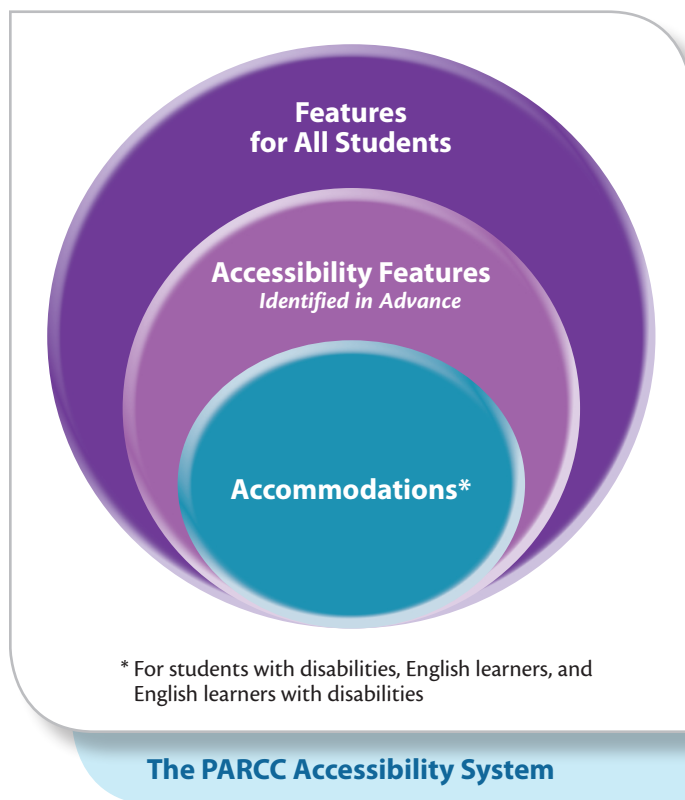
In addition, PARCC provides administrative considerations for all students. Principals have the authority to schedule students in other testing spaces and at different scheduled times, as long as all formal PARCC requirements are met. Examples of administrative considerations for all students include: testing in a small group, allowing frequent supervised breaks, taking the test at a different time of day, testing in a separate or alternate location, testing in a specified area or seating, and using adaptive and specialized equipment or furniture.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

A student's performance on the PARCC assessments should be impacted as little as possible by his or her disability. Accommodations level the playing field by helping to mitigate the effects of the disability; they do not reduce learning expectations. PARCC assessment accommodations adjust the testing situation, test format, and/or test administration process to provide equitable access for students with disabilities and increase the probability that they will receive valid scores. They do not change the construct being assessed.

Students should never be introduced to an accommodation when they take the PARCC assessments. In fact, accommodations provided on the PARCC assessments should be generally consistent with those provided for classroom assessments. However, some classroom accommodations may not be permissible for the PARCC assessments if their use would impact the validity of the assessment results. Section 3: Accommodations for Students with Disabilities in the *PARCC Accessibility Features and Accommodations Manual* describes accommodations that will ensure valid and reliable scores on the PARCC assessments. [*Note*: Examples also are shown in the text box, Accommodations for the Computer-Delivered PARCC Assessments.]

IEP and/or Section 504 team members select accommodations for instruction and assessment, and for the PARCC assessments. Section 5: Decision-Making Process for Selecting, Using, and Evaluating Accommodations for Students with Disabilities, English Learners, and English Learners with Disabilities in the *PARCC Accessibility Features and Accommodations Manual* provides an overview of steps that teams may consider when working with PARCC accommodations.

Accommodations for the Computer-Delivered PARCC Assessments

The *PARCC Accessibility Features and Accommodations Manual* describes accommodations that IEP or Section 504 teams may select for students with disabilities based on their individual needs. Examples follow. [*Note*: To ensure that the accommodation results in a valid score, the *PARCC Accessibility Features and Accommodations Manual* provides additional guidance that IEP and Section 504 teams should consider when selecting certain accommodations for an individual student. In the following discussion, those accommodations are noted with an*.]

Presentation Accommodations

Presentation accommodations alter the method or format used to administer the assessments and may be of particular interest to teachers, given the new PARCC computer-based delivery system. Examples of presentation accommodations include:

- Assistive technology. [*Note*: PARCC assessments allow for a wide range of assistive technology to support individual student needs. Guidelines will be available in Fall 2013.]

- Braille edition of the ELA/L and mathematics assessments (hard copy); refreshable braille for ELA/L only.

- Closed-captioning of multimedia passages in the ELA/L.

- Descriptive video (narrated audio description of key visual elements on the ELA/L).

- Paper-and-pencil edition of the test for a student who cannot use a computer to take the test. [*Note*: The *PARCC Accessibility Features and Accommodations Manual* contains a list of available accommodations for students who use the paper-and-pencil edition.]

- Tactile graphics for students who read braille.

- Video of an interpreter using American Sign Language (ASL) for the mathematics assessments and/or the test directions. [*Note*: If the student does not use ASL, an interpreter and a separate setting are an option.]

- Text-to-speech for the ELA/L assessments, including items, response options, and passages.*

Response Accommodations

Response accommodations allow students to use alternative methods to respond to test items. Examples of response accommodations include:

- Assistive technology. [Note: PARCC assessments allow for a wide range of assistive technology to support individual student needs. Guidelines will be available in Fall 2013.]

- Braille note taker. [*Note*: An electronic braille note taker can be used as a word processor; however, the grammar checker tool, Internet, and stored file functionalities must be turned off during the assessments.]

- Scribing or speech-to-text (e.g., dictation/transcription) for the ELA/L and mathematics assessments. Examples include: dictating responses using speech-to-text software that is embedded in the assessments; using an augmentative/assistive communication device (e.g., picture word board); and signing, gesturing, pointing, or eye gazing.*

- Calculation device for the noncalculation sections of the mathematics assessments.*

- Word prediction on the ELA/L performance-based assessments.*

Timing and Scheduling Accommodations

Timing and scheduling accommodations are changes in the allowable length of time a student has to complete the assessment or a change in the way time is organized. An example of a timing and scheduling accommodation is being given extended time, but not more than one school day, to finish each test session.

Unique Accommodations

While the PARCC accessibility features and accommodations are quite comprehensive, it is possible that a student may require a unique accommodation. In such cases, consult with your district as to the formal approval procedure.

For a more thorough discussion, see Section 3: Accommodations for Students with Disabilities, in the *PARCC Accessibility Features and Accommodations Manual*.

What Teachers Can Do to Support Students

- Expect all students, including students with disabilities, to achieve Common Core State Standards at the appropriate grade level. Ensure that you fully understand the Common Core State Standards and are prepared to provide instruction that enables students to achieve the standards.

- Familiarize yourself with the accessibility features in the new PARCC assessments that are available to all students. (For more information, see Section 2: PARCC Accessibility System and Supports for All Students Taking the PARCC Assessments in the *PARCC Accessibility Features and Accommodations Manual*.) Provide opportunities for students to use these various features as part of regular classroom instruction and assessment. Invite students to tell you which ones are particularly helpful to them and which ones are not.

- Learn about accommodations for students with disabilities. Pay particular attention to how particular accommodations will look different when presented online. (For more information, see Section 3: Accommodations for Students with Disabilities in the *PARCC Accessibility Features and Accommodations Manual*.)

- Make sure that students with disabilities use accommodations listed on their IEPs and/or Section 504 plans as part of regular classroom instruction and assessment and that they are provided with multiple opportunities to practice with online

Accessibility features and accommodations allow more students to participate in the PARCC assessments.

tools. *Remember*: Students should not use an accommodation for the first time on a PARCC assessment.

- Know that you are part of a school-based team that includes special educators, related service providers, administrators, and parents. Enlist their help and support.

- Sign up on the PARCC website (**www.parcconline.org**) to receive updates on new resources and findings. Look for a series of practical tools (e.g., questions to ask students about accommodation tools) that will be released as appendices to the *PARCC Accessibility Features and Accommodations Manual* in the coming months.

Find Out More

Visit the PARCC website (**www.parcconline.org**) for more information and resources, including:

- *PARCC Accessibility Features and Accommodations Manual* (**http://www.parcconline.org/parcc-assessment-policies**).

- *PARCC: A New Vision of Assessment* (**http://www.parcconline.org/about-parcc**). This PowerPoint presentation provides an overview of the PARCC assessments and describes advantages of the new PARCC system.

- PARCC assessment sample items (**http://www.parcconline.org/samples/item-task-prototypes**).

- PARCC assessment blueprints (**http://www.parcconline.org/assessment-blueprints-test-specs**). PARCC has released a set of test specification documents, including assessment blueprints and evidence statement tables, to help educators, parents, and the general public better understand the design of the PARCC assessments.

- PARCC performance level descriptors (**http://www.parcconline.org/CCRD**). These describe what students will be expected to know and do.

- Common Core State Standards (**http://www.corestandards.org/**).

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