

OLD TEST VS NEW TEST

In spring 2015, roughly half of Massachusetts school districts chose to take a new state assessment that, like the learning standards adopted in 2010, challenge students to think deeply, write often and defend their reasoning – all “real world” skills they need.

The new assessment is called PARCC, the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Career, and covers math and English Language Arts in grades 3 through high school. The Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education will decide in fall 2015 whether to replace the 17-year old MCAS with PARCC.

Here’s how Massachusetts old and new state assessments compare.

MCAS

Outdated

Designed in the mid- to late-1990’s, remains virtually unchanged since 1998. Not designed to indicate readiness for college and career.

Rarely measures students’ deeper learning

Questions typically focused on comprehension and information recall rather than conceptual understanding.

Does not fully reflect state learning standards to measure college and career readiness

When standards and assessments do not align, test prep can encroach on instructional time.

High school test sets too low a bar

MCAS high school tests measure content no higher than the end of tenth grade standards; a large proportion of the items on recent 10th grade Math tests measure sixth, seventh, or eighth grade standards.

Fails to deliver honest measures of whether students are on track for college and career

Unaligned across grade levels

MCAS tests are not connected across grade levels; that means a Proficient score in grade 4 may not mean a student is on track to meet that in grade 8.

High school assessments not used for placement

Massachusetts high school students now take an additional, separate test to determine their placement in postsecondary courses.

PARCC

Modern, upgrade

Designed beginning in 2011, this next generation assessment is designed to measure college- and career-readiness, and leverages technology to assess a broader set of knowledge and skills.

Measures critical thinking and problem solving

Questions require students to handle complex material, support arguments with evidence, and explain reasoning when solving problems.

Reflects current learning standards to measure college and career readiness

The Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks make clear what students should know and be able to do at every step in their academic progression toward college and career readiness. These are the root of the new assessments.

Sets a high bar for learning

The series of ninth through eleventh grade high school tests enable PARCC to assess a wide depth and breadth of content. Math tests require students to apply skills, concepts, and understandings to solve multi-step problems requiring abstract reasoning, precision, perseverance, and strategic use of tools.

Will be aligned with the expectations of two- and four-year colleges and validated by higher education

Aligns across grade levels to track a student’s progress

The new assessment system spans grades three through eleven to reflect the progression of skills and knowledge needed to be college and career ready.

High school assessments used for college placement

Massachusetts public colleges and universities plan to use PARCC scores for purposes of college placement. This means that students need not take remedial courses if they demonstrate appropriate level of mastery.