

# State education chief defends PARCC

## David Hespe, New Jersey Education Commissioner, defends PARCC testing, and says parents should be insisting on it.



Parents should be demanding tests like PARCC (Photo: Getty Images/iStockphoto)

As New Jersey schools transition to a new statewide test called PARCC, many parents are confused — and receiving conflicting information — about the new computer-based assessment. It's time to set the record straight.

When it comes to the new assessments, parents should *demand* a more advanced assessment like PARCC. Consider:

- Too many students are graduating high school and heading to college, only to have to take remedial classes to learn materials that they should have already learned. In fact, a full 70 percent of students entering New Jersey's county colleges can't begin their college career unless they pay for remediation classes.
- Computer-based assessments are becoming common for today's students. The GED test is now computer-based, and the SAT college-entrance exams will also be computer-based. In addition, districts have incorporated computer literacy into their curriculum.
- Our previous paper-and-pencil test, the NJASK, was a bit of a pushover. Each year, New Jersey had a number of schools where *every student* was proficient. We saw some schools where nearly a third of all students received a *perfect* score.
- The old NJASK test really didn't give any meaningful feedback to improve schools or inform parents of their child's progress. It told schools and parents whether students were proficient — and that's about all. If a child wasn't proficient, it required the school to do even *more* testing to pinpoint the problem areas.
- And our HSPA high-school graduation test? That was, at best, a ninth-grade test (in some higher performing schools, eighth graders could easily handle it). The result is that over half of our graduates are not adequately prepared academically for the challenges of college and careers.

To be fair, the old NJASK test did a fine job of letting the federal government know we were complying with the No Child Left Behind Act's requirement that all students in grades 3-8 be tested. But, considering that children throughout the state spent hours taking a test that didn't help improve their schools, parents *should* have higher expectations of our statewide assessment.

Let me also directly address two areas of concern that may have been the source of misinformation among some parents:

- Is PARCC used for grade advancement? For students in New Jersey, passing PARCC isn't required to advance from one grade to the next. It was not required with the former NJ ASK test, and it is not a requirement of PARCC tests.
- Will student data be protected? Protecting the privacy of student educational records is a top priority for the department. Protections are in place at both the state and federal levels, and through all contracts and agreements, intended to prevent student-identifiable data from being marketed or distributed. We have always protected — and will continue to protect — all student data.

As a parent myself, I know we want a quality education that not only helps our children fulfill their potential, but provides information that empowers parents to know how their child is progressing and whether they are on track to succeed when they go on to college or career.

Parents should expect a new test that can help improve their local schools. They should expect to get meaningful feedback on how their child is progressing academically. That's what PARCC is designed to do

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