

Sudbury Public Schools

*40 Fairbank Road
Sudbury, Massachusetts 01776
Phone: (978) 639-3216*



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Dear SPS Families,

Background

Over the past several years, the Sudbury Public Schools and school districts throughout the Commonwealth have been working to implement new academic standards in the core subject areas of English Language Arts and Mathematics. These standards incorporate the Common Core Standards as well as others that are specific to Massachusetts. These new standards undergird our efforts to ensure that each student has the opportunity to develop a deep understanding of the subject matter, think critically, and apply their learning to the real world.

Changes to the Mathematics and English Language Arts learning standards have prompted shifts in the statewide assessment system for these subject areas. Last spring DESE, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, conducted the first of a two-part field test of the PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career) assessment. PARCC is a multi-state consortium which collaborated to create a common set of assessments aligned to the Common Core. PARCC assessments are designed to measure students' progress toward college and career readiness and to provide teachers with information to inform instruction and structure student support.

In Sudbury, selected classrooms in grades 3-8 took components of the PARCC assessment during the spring of 2014. Results were not released to schools or to the public, but rather were used to evaluate questions and make adjustments to the composition of the assessment. Districts were given the option of continuing with the MCAS assessment for Mathematics and English Language Arts for the 2014-15 school year or field testing the PARCC for a second year. Additionally, districts could elect to take a computer-based or paper-based version of the PARCC assessment. DESE will make a determination in the fall of 2015 whether to adopt the PARCC assessment as the official statewide assessment for Mathematics and English Language Arts or whether to begin development of the 'Next Generation' MCAS.

Sudbury, like 54% of Massachusetts districts, elected to take the PARCC assessment, believing that the PARCC will more accurately assess our efforts to align curriculum to the standards and structure classroom learning to include opportunities for higher order thinking. We are also hopeful that the PARCC will better prepare students for standards-based assessment, whether that be the PARCC or a revised version of the MCAS. In order to give teachers and students more time to become comfortable with online performance tasks, Sudbury students will be taking the paper-based version of the PARCC this year.

Structure of the PARCC

PARCC assessments occur twice during the school year, in March after approximately 75% of the instructional year and in May after approximately 90% of the instructional year. The March assessments are structured as Performance-Based Assessments or PBAs. In English Language Arts, the PBAs focus on writing effectively and analyzing text. In Mathematics, they focus on solving multi-step problems and using abstract reasoning. PBAs are scored by hand and by machine. The May assessments are structured as End of Year or EOY assessments. In English Language Arts, the EOYs focus on reading comprehension. In Mathematics they focus on understanding major grade level concepts. EOY assessments are machine scored. Eighth grade students taking Algebra I will take the Algebra I test. Eighth grade students taking eighth grade math will take eighth grade math.

There are several noteworthy differences between the structure of the PARCC and that of the MCAS. The PARCC incorporates a number of universal design accessibility features that are available to all students. Additionally, building principals can make decisions about how the assessment is administered, such as allowing a student to test in a small group or separate setting. The PARCC is timed. Each testing unit consists of a set number of minutes (ranging from 40-60) with a built in extra time 'bumper' of 50%. For example, the elementary narrative writing PBA (unit 3) consists of 40 minutes of standard time with a 20 minute bumper available to any student who requires additional time. English language learners and students with an extended time accommodation on their IEP or 504 Plan may exceed the unit time. All students are provided standardized math reference sheets. Individualized reference sheets or graphic organizers are not allowed, however.

Schools and families will receive student results from the PARCC assessment. These results will include a proficiency rating and a student growth percentile. PARCC results will factor into school and district accountability ratings. Students in grades 5 and 8 will continue to take the MCAS Science Technology and Engineering assessment. Students qualifying for the MCAS ALT will continue to take that assessment. The MCAS will remain as the competency determination for high school graduation through the class of 2019, this year's eighth graders.

DESE has designated ***March 23-April 6 as the PBA testing window for paper-based assessment.*** Students will take three sessions in ELA and two in Mathematics. The EOY testing window is May 11-22 with two sessions in mathematics at the middle and elementary school levels, one session in ELA at the elementary level and two sessions in ELA at the middle school level. Specific information about testing times will be shared by building principals.

Resources

The following resources from DESE and PARCC may be useful to you: [DESE Parent Flier](#), [Fact Sheet](#), [DESE FAQ](#), [PARCC Parent Resources including a FAQ](#), [PARCC Accessibility and Accommodation Manual](#), [PARCC Sample Test Items](#).

Please feel free to contact your building principal or me with questions you may have. Know that as a district we understand that statewide testing can be stressful and that we are committed to working with students and families to provide as supportive testing environment as possible.

Sincerely,



Kim Swain
Assistant Superintendent of Schools

