

## **Update on the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) Pilot**

The Public Schools of Northborough and Southborough participated in the FY 2014 PARCC pilot. Our districts, and the individual schools participating in the pilot, were randomly selected by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. With the exception of a few isolated test sites in FY13, this year was the initial pilot that represented a significant number of schools. In total, 313 students from across our District representing a random sampling of students in grades 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, and 11 participated. Testing was administered in Mathematics and English Language Arts. Of this total, 116 tests were administered in the paper/pencil format and 197 online. Approximately 81,000 students from across the Commonwealth representing 1,050 schools in 345 Districts participated. The Massachusetts Board of Education plans to consider and take a vote in the fall of 2015 to continue with MCAS (revisions proposed to the current test format and content) or adopt PARCC.

MCAS will be administered at the high school level in grade 10 in both ELA and Mathematics through 2016 (current 8<sup>th</sup> graders) and it remains a graduation requirement. Students will continue to participate in MCAS in the area of science and technology in grades 5, 8, 9 or 11. If PARCC is adopted, the paper/pencil test is currently proposed to be an option through 2017.

The piloting of PARCC this year provided us with an opportunity to experience the actual testing format, both online and paper/pencil, observe the students' response to the tests in form and content, assess our technical infrastructure, and determine if the timed testing schedule is adequate. PARCC is a timed test; MCAS is currently not a timed test. No individual student, school or district data is available from this year's PARCC pilot. However, the DESE released a representative random sampling of the testing data based on the first administration of the Performance Based Assessment (PBA). This test is administered in March and this year coincided with the MCAS testing schedule. The DESE has not compiled or released any information on the End of the Year Assessment (EOY) at this time.

A student survey was embedded into the pilot test. A random sampling of results is available and is included in the attached copy of a PowerPoint presented by the DESE. While Districts were not allowed to ask students questions specific to content, we did meet with our students to gather our own data regarding the administration of the test, testing format and general reactions to PARCC compared to MCAS. Overall, a random sampling of our students differs to some degree with the random sampling reported by the DESE. A higher percentage of our students reported that the questions were unclear, the directions confusing, and the experience of taking the test online was a good one but that many technical issues regarding access and input arose during the testing. We recognize that this was the first pilot of significant numbers and it is our belief that the DESE will continue to work on these issues.

With respect to the implementation of the online version, three schools within our District participated in the online assessment. Significant issues arose over the complexity of the testing format, the ability to input student responses, the loss of data during the assessment process, technical interruptions during the testing process, and the receipt of timeliness of frequent PARCC updates. The cost required by our technical team to implement a pilot of this size was substantial. The scheduling was challenging and next year given the proposed combination of PARCC and MCAS, students potentially could be scheduled for testing in both areas within the same window of time. During our online testing, our computer labs were closed for general student access and our technical support personnel were limited to working with students who were piloting PARCC. The success of our pilot, online and paper/pencil, is attributed to the combined work of our administrators, director of technology and technology support personnel, teachers and support staff and our "PARCC pioneer" students. It truly has been representative of the spirit of collaboration that is a part of our "One Community of Learners" philosophy.

Our educational goals for participating in this pilot were met. The general consensus is that this test is a rigorous, high-stakes assessment which is aligned with the eight mathematical practices and the college and career readiness anchor standards included in the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks/Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Our experience

will help form our teaching and learning and the model units of instruction and related assessments provided will be used as work samples for our students. The assessments are good resources to prepare our students in the content areas for academic success and support our content and skill expectations for all students at each grade level. Throughout this next year, we will use the model assessments which are aligned with PARCC as activities to support our curriculum. Preparing our students in the classroom provides opportunities to engage teachers and students in conversations and provide meaningful feedback.

A new data model is under development that will equalize the current MCAS student accountability data with the new PARCC assessments results. This “equipercentile linking” will continue to determine and report a student’s level of achievement and growth. The data will be reported by District in the aggregate and by subgroup. The DESE is offering all districts that choose PARCC an opportunity be “held harmless” from any decline in student scores in either level or SGP which may result from this new calculation method. Basically, if this year a District is identified as a Level 2 District and the pupil performance indicator (PPI) shows moderate growth, a District which may receive “equipercentile linking” results that show a decline, will be returned to the pre-PARCC performance levels. Conversely, if a district’s results exceed the current performance indicators, a post-PARCC district will be placed at the higher levels of performance.

Recently, an advisory from M.A.S.S. and M.A.S.C. legal counsel suggests that the School Committees consider taking a formal vote as to whether Districts will pilot PARCC in FY15 or continue with MCAS. It is important to note that two dates for selection of format are in place – June 30, 2014 or October 1, 2014. Districts are asked to identify PARCC or MCAS and choose the test form (online or paper/pencil).

Unlike the pilot test, Districts *must* choose to administer PARCC or MCAS in FY15. Based upon the district’s selection, schools within a district will participate in either PARCC or MCAS and participate in all testing sessions specific to the test selected. If selection is made to administer PARCC, all schools within the District will participate in the PBA and EOY portions of both Mathematics and ELA. If we select PARCC for Algonquin, the District has the option of selecting 9<sup>th</sup> & 11<sup>th</sup> grade ELA and/or the course specific test in Mathematics for grades 9 and 11, i.e., Integrated Mathematics, Algebra 1. These tests are in addition to the MCAS 10<sup>th</sup> grade ELA and Math tests currently required for graduation.

The DESE reports that we have transitioned from piloting to *operationalizing* PARCC in FY15. This transition will provide greater numbers which will then support the identification of cut scores, scaled scores and grade level determination of content. Unlike the FY14 pilot where no data is reported to Districts, schools or parents, the 2015 data will be reported and used to calculate students’ levels, SGP and District accountability. This implementation precedes the actual BOE vote to adopt PARCC. Districts which register selection by June 30 will be guaranteed the requested test format. Any district registering a request by October 1 may receive its choice “pending availability, and instructions forthcoming.” This language *suggests* that districts which select PARCC may not be able to implement it. Districts which do not register any decision after October 1 will be required to administer MCAS. In all scenarios, a district may select paper/pencil or online formats. While this is the current language, we continue to monitor any changes that would prohibit us from selecting MCAS by October 1, 2014.

We are prepared to make a recommendation to the School Committee based upon our discussions as to which date we wish to register our decision.

Respectfully submitted,

Christine Johnson, Assistant Superintendent

Documents provided: DESE PowerPoint, “Information to Help Districts Choose MCAS or PARCC in Spring 2015”

6.5.15