

Meeting Participation Targets for New Jersey State Assessments: Action Plan Development Guide

New Jersey Department of Education

In an educational accountability system, assessments are one of the tools we must use to improve teaching and learning. Under the federal *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* and the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*, each state is required to annually measure the academic achievement of not less than 95% of its students through participation in state assessments. This requirement is to ensure that schools are held accountable for the achievement of **every student** and that the results of **all students** are used to improve educational outcomes, increase equity, improve instruction and close achievement gaps.

The recent transition to New Jersey's new state assessments brought some new challenges to school districts with regard to communicating the importance of having all students represented in the accountability system. The purpose of this document is to offer districts tools to engage educators, students and families in identifying barriers to participation and, through creative problem-solving, working toward the goal of increasing student participation in the 2016 state assessments.

Raising participation rates at the school, district and state levels will yield more accurate information regarding areas of strength and weakness for all students, as well as for subgroups. This information not only broadens representation in the accountability system, but it informs the ongoing process of aligning curriculum and instruction to the knowledge and skills that New Jersey students are expected to learn.

Action Planning Guide

Step 1: Engage a Communication Team

A good first step to increasing participation in state assessments is bringing together like-minded administrators, teachers, counselors, administrators, parents, students, and community members to review your district/school(s) participation rate data and other anecdotal data. The group's goal would be to identify the root causes of a low participation rate and create an action plan with strategies to improve communication with educators, families and students regarding the value having all students in the assessment system.

Step 2: Review and Analyze Data

The communication team should review the factors that can create barriers to participation.

- **Data:** Review the data on the *ESEA* Preliminary District/School Profiles 2015 and the district's/school's summary assessment reports.

- **Patterns:** Identify schools, subgroups, tested grades, content areas, and courses in which participation for the 2014-2015 administration was low. Determine if the problem is focused on a specific subpopulation, school-wide or district-wide.
 - Was this a high school problem only?
 - Were there specific subgroups with low representation (e.g., students with IEPs, English Language Learners)?
 - Was there a greater problem with Algebra 2 and Geometry than with English?
- **Root Causes:** Drill down to identify the reasons for the low participation rate or the barriers that might prevent students from participating (e.g. over-assessment, negative press).
 - Did we have a large number of students who only took one part of the assessment (e.g., the performance-based or the end-of-year)? If so, why?
 - Did we have a large number of students who transferred to another school or class mid-semester or mid-year?
 - Did we have a number of students who would not participate in PARCC because they met their graduation requirements through other assessments?
 - Did we have a large number of voids? If so, what were the reasons (e.g., students discontinued taking the test, students did not respond to a sufficient number of questions to get a valid score)?
 - How many students did not take the assessments because they refused or their parents would not permit them to take the test? What were their concerns?
 - Talk with staff, students and parent advisory groups to identify the information they need to know to address their concerns.
 - Reflect on community reactions obtained during last year's test administration to identify communication gaps.

Step 3: Develop an Action Plan to Improve Participation Rate

Based on the results of the analysis in Step 2, target actions towards the groups (e.g., teachers, parents, or students) who will most likely effectuate a positive change.

- Outline specific actions and realistic timeframes to achieve the desired improvements.
 - Include the methods of communication that work best in your district, such as meetings, social media, public service announcements (PSAs), newsletters, web postings, student posters and announcements.
- Borrow ideas from other districts that have higher participation rates.
- Assign responsibilities to specific team members who can best communicate to various constituencies.
- Gain support from key stakeholders (e.g., Board of Education, PTO, Special Education Parent Advisory Group).

Step 4: Put Your Plan into Action and Evaluate Progress

Get your implementation activities under way in time to impact this year's assessment. Enlist help from key stakeholders to maintain communication regarding the assessments. Monitor progress and adjust your activities as necessary.

Actions and Resources to Consider for Your Plan

To improve participation in state assessments, districts and schools might engage in the following action steps:

- Disseminate through the district's website, social media, fliers and PTO resources describing the purpose, content and format of the assessments;
- Conduct informational sessions with parents and community members regarding the assessments. Have content experts on hand to review item types and format and show parents actual test items. Target specific subgroups with information regarding accommodations for English Learners and students with disabilities or alternate assessments (Dynamic Learning Maps and ACCESS for ELLs);
- Engage students in groups to discuss the purpose of the PARCC, the plans for the district to use the results to improve instruction and strategies for increasing participation;
- Engage students in a communication campaign with slogans, announcements and posters to promote the value of participation in state assessments;
- Familiarize parents and family members with the actual PARCC test items for their children's grade or tested content area through demonstration or letter with links to the assessment websites;
- Conduct a meeting with the Special Education Parent Advisory Group on the PARCC and DLM and the accommodations and accessibility features available to students during testing;
- Have staff available to meet with parents to assist them in interpreting PARCC score reports;
- Have staff knowledgeable about the PARCC content and item types and score report; interpretation attend meetings of your professional learning communities to review results and determine how results can be used to drive instruction;

- Provide teachers of grades/content areas assessed with strategies for communicating the value of participation with students; and/or
- Use staff meetings to assist educators with analysis of PARCC results to improve student achievement. Include child study team members and other service providers.

Resources for Parent Communication

The following resources were selected to assist in this effort:

Resources for Parents and Students

- [New Jersey State Assessments](#)
- [Parent PARCC Questions Answered](#)
- [Some Myths and Facts About Assessment and PARCC](#)
- [Guide to Finding and Using PARCC Test Questions](#)
- [Understanding the PARCC Scores – Resources for Parents](#)
- [A Guide to Parent and Educator Conversations about the PARCC Score Reports](#)
- [Communicating PARCC Assessment Results to Families](#)
- [Support for Parents as They Talk to Their Child about PARCC Scores](#)
- [Dynamic Learning Maps \(DLM\) Parent Brochure](#)
- [DLM: Understanding Your Child’s Performance and Learning Profiles](#)
- [For Parents of English Language Learners \(ELLs\) – Access for ELLs 2.0](#)
- [Student Resources on PARCC](#)

Resources for Educators

- [New Jersey State Assessments](#)
- [District Toolkit of Resources on Assessments](#)

- [Top Twelve Resources for Teachers](#)
- [Educator Guide to Finding and Using PARCC Test Questions](#)
- [Assessment for English Language Learners \(ELLs\) - ACCESS for ELLs 2.0](#)
- [Dynamic Learning Maps Assessment](#)