



NORWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

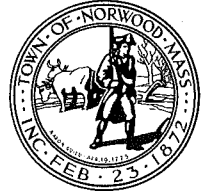
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November 3, 2014

Dear Parents and Guardians:

I'd like to take this opportunity to inform you about the new PARCC tests that all grade 3-8 students will be taking this spring instead of MCAS. In order to limit the amount of testing that high school students are already taking (ReadiStep, PSAT, SAT, ACT, AP), the high school has chosen to continue with grade 10 MCAS testing and to not take the grade 9-11 PARCC tests this year. Norwood's decision to do a partial implementation of PARCC testing is consistent with other districts in the state.

There are some important differences between the MCAS and PARCC tests that you should know about:

1. As of today, Massachusetts is planning to move from its single-state testing system (MCAS) to a multi-state testing system (PARCC) as a way to measure progress toward the Common Core State Standards, which are national standards. The PARCC consortium is presently comprised of 11 states and D.C. The MA Commissioner and Board of Education have said that if the PARCC tests are not as or more rigorous than our current MCAS state tests, they will not move to PARCC (which stands for Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers). The expectation is that a consortium will also bring down the cost of testing.
2. The primary purpose of PARCC is to determine if elementary and middle school students are on track and if high school students are truly prepared for success at the college or career of their choice. MCAS is not designed to make such claims. While the vast majority (over 80%) of the state's graduates is "proficient" in ELA and math according to grade 10 MCAS results, one third (33%) of the state's graduates must nevertheless take remedial math and English/composition courses in college in order to be successful. This is not acceptable.
3. For this reason we expect that PARCC tests in ELA and math will be more rigorous than MCAS. This is not a bad thing.
4. For students with severe disabilities, PARCC will not offer an Alternate Assessment; therefore, the MCAS-Alt test will continue to be administered. However, for ELL students and all other students with disabilities PARCC will provide very similar accommodations to those of MCAS.
5. PARCC tests are intended to be taken on computers (another potential cost saver), but because this is the first year of full implementation, districts and schools have a choice of paper or computer testing. Norwood does not yet have the technological capacity to do all the testing online and to do so would mean our computer labs would have to be used only for testing and not for other instructional purposes during the testing periods or we would need to purchase additional student devices. Balch and Prescott have volunteered to do computer-based testing so we can ease into the new testing

format, and all our other elementary and middle schools chose paper and pencil testing for this year. On this note, it is important to know that the state is making sure that both forms of the PARCC test (computer and paper) are comparable to one another and to the MCAS so that no student will be advantaged or disadvantaged. Furthermore, for this year only, the state has adopted a "hold harmless" district accountability policy so that no school or district will be disadvantaged for choosing the PARCC over MCAS testing. Also, PARCC will provide very similar accommodations for ELLs and students with disabilities for both computer and paper tests.

6. There will not be a PARCC test for science or technology. Therefore, grades 5, 8, and 9/10 will continue to take the MCAS Science and Technology tests.
7. PARCC consists of two ELA and two math tests: the **Performance-Based Assessment (PBA)** that asks students to construct responses that need to be scored by humans, and the **End of Year Assessment (EOY)** where students select responses that can be scored by a machine. The PBA tests are given in March-April, the EOY tests are in May, and the grade 5 and 8 MCAS science tests are also in May. For grade 10: ELA MCAS composition and reading comprehension tests are on March 24-26; math MCAS is on May 12-13; and grade 9/10 biology is on June 2.

Your principal will be developing a test schedule for ELA, math, and science that will be posted to the school website so everyone knows when the various tests will occur within the PARCC and MCAS testing windows. Please do not schedule vacations with your child during any of these testing periods (or during school time). We have a very limited amount of time to prepare our students for success, and our schools have participation requirements that must be met or we will be subject to consequences that have a negative impact on the school, the whole district, and our community. **Please keep in mind the main purposes of the Common Core Standards and the PARCC and MCAS tests for those content standards are to make sure all our educators, students, and parents are held to appropriately high local, state, national, and global standards so that our students and your children can learn to use their minds well and be successful at the college or career of their choice.** This is a critical national and local goal.

To see some samples of the PARCC tests go to <http://www.parcconline.org/practice-tests> and to <http://www.parcconline.org/samples/item-task-prototypes>, and to find out more information about PARCC and other assessment information regarding how Norwood is doing, I encourage you to go to our district assessment page at <http://www.norwood.k12.ma.us/curriculum/assessment.cfm>. If you have any concerns about the Common Core or PARCC, you should watch the very clear and informative 3-minute video found at <http://www.corestandards.org/what-parents-should-know/>.

Thank you for your attention to this letter and for being an actively engaged member of our educational support team!

Sincerely,

