

Stakeholder Perspectives
on PARCC

PARCC Report

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Introduction and Context

On April 27, 2018 New Jersey Commissioner of Education Dr. Lamont Repollet and the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) released [a statewide broadcast](#) calling for public input to inform New Jersey's next generation of statewide assessments. This broadcast marked the first step of the transition away from PARCC, or Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, as [promised by Gov. Phil Murphy](#). The NJDOE subsequently scheduled approximately 70 events designed to capture public input throughout the state and via webinar.

The New Jersey Education Association (NJEA) partnered with the NJDOE to design, host, and facilitate **four** community meetings with NJEA members, educators, parents/caregivers, students, and other interested stakeholders. Further, NJEA and the NJDOE collaborated on **two** in-school sessions with high school students to ensure that diverse experiences with PARCC were not merely represented, but influential to the future of statewide assessment.

- May 24 - Southern Region Community Meeting
- May 30 - Northeastern Region Community Meeting
- June 5 - Northwestern Region Community Meeting
- June 7 - Central Region Community Meeting
- June 11 - High School Student Meeting
- June 12 - High School Student Meeting

Community and Student Meetings

NJEA's session structure was grounded in the concept of human-centered design, reflecting the need to fully capture and understand the diverse experiences of those directly affected by the PARCC assessment since its onset in 2010. Throughout these meetings, NJEA staff and NJEA members worked with participant groups to facilitate three protocols. Following the community meetings, stakeholders came together to collaboratively process the findings.

Goal of the Community and Student Meetings

The goal of the community and student meetings was to explore participants lived experiences with PARCC, whether educator, parent/caregiver, student, or other interested stakeholder, in order to:

- Uncover connections, patterns, and trends among experiences and perspectives.
- Map the current statewide assessment system.
- Inform the design of a transition to the next statewide assessment that reflects not only best practice, but the values, perspectives and experiences of stakeholders.

Process and Protocols

Community meetings began with the NJDOE providing a brief introduction of the current system of statewide assessment. During this introduction, the NJDOE highlighted both federal and state requirements. Following this, NJEA Professional Development and Instructional Issues Division staff reviewed the driving goal and purpose of the work prior to facilitating three participant-centered protocols.

• **Protocol 1: Stakeholder Interviews** – Participants were broken into teams of three and were given 15 minutes each to interview each other. During the interviews, participants shared their PARCC stories while a participant-notetaker captured individual PARCC perspectives, experiences and recommendations for the future of New Jersey's statewide assessment system. *Protocol materials and all completed Stakeholder Interview sheets can be found in the appendices.*

• **Protocol 2: Journey Mapping** – Participants were divided into small role-alike groups (educators, parents/caregivers, students, other stakeholders) and were asked to record responses on the impact of PARCC before, during and after implementation each year. This process helped uncover trends in lived physical and emotional experiences with PARCC. *Protocol materials, images of the process, and synthesized Journey Maps can be found in the appendices.*

- **Protocol 3: Authentic Assessment Exploration** – Remaining in role-alike groups, participants responded to a series of questions related to authentic and relevant assessment. *Protocol materials, images of the process, and synthesized outcomes can be found in the appendices.*

At the conclusion of community meetings, a question-and-answer forum was opened for participants to directly interact with representatives from the NJDOE. During this time, participants asked questions, expressed concerns over the current assessment system, and sought clarification on federal and state requirements.¹

Participant Breakdown

NJEA Members & Non-Member Educators	111
Parents/Caregivers	29
Students	82
Other Interested Stakeholders (School Board Members, school Administrators, university professors, otherwise interested citizens)	10
Total Participants:	232

Protocol #1: Stakeholder Interviews – Data Processing

Following the community meetings, a team of stakeholders came together to process data collected at the events. NJEA believes in the importance of representing a variety of voices and values a transparent and unbiased process. For these reasons, NJEA extended invitations to representatives with divergent perspectives on PARCC from various outside organizations. This invitation included representatives from the organizations participating in the Leadership for Excellence in Education (LEE) group and to the members of the New Jersey State Board of Education, among others. All members who expressed an interest in participating were welcomed to attend. These individuals comprised the Stakeholder Interview (Protocol #1) processing team:

Rose Acerra	President, New Jersey Parent Teacher Association; LEE Group
Julie Borst	Executive Director of Save Our Schools New Jersey
Debra Bradley, Esq.	Director of Government Relations, New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association; LEE Group
Vince DeLucia	Director/Educator in Residence, New Jersey School Boards Association; LEE Group
Dr. Stefani Hite	Founder, Tigris Education Solutions
Stan Karp	Director of Secondary Reform Project, Education Law Center
Mel Katz	NJEA Member
Camy Kobylinski	Associate Director of Professional Development & Instructional Issues, New Jersey Education Association
Jennifer Marsh	Associate Director of Communications, New Jersey Education Association
Dr. Christine Miles	Associate Director of Professional Development & Instructional Issues, New Jersey Education Association
Dr. Eric Milou	Professor of Mathematics, Rowan University
Diana Pasculli	Chief Public Affairs Officer, New Jersey Department of Education
Michael Ritzius	Associate Director of Professional Development & Instructional Issues, New Jersey Education Association
Colleen Schulz-Eskow	Director of Government Affairs, New Jersey Department of Education
Matt Stagliano	Associate Director of Communications, New Jersey Education Association
Liz Walsh	Office of Strategic Operations, New Jersey Department of Education

¹ The open Q&A forum was omitted from the May 24th community meeting, due to unforeseen constraints on time.

Process and Commitments

The stakeholder interview protocol process² allows one to step into the shoes of the interviewee and gain insights into their perspective. This approach was chosen because it provides enhanced clarity about the impact of PARCC from the viewpoint of various stakeholders. It helps improve understanding of how students, parents/caregivers, educators, and other stakeholders assess the value, or lack thereof, created for them by the test and identify the barriers to teaching and learning that need to be addressed.

[Affinity mapping](#)³ was used to process the stakeholder interviews. This method was chosen because of its ability to make sense of extensive mixed data, such as facts, stakeholder opinions and needs, insights, and design issues. By breaking down the stakeholder interview data into individual ideas on sticky-notes and then clustering those notes into affinity groupings, the stakeholder interview processing team (identified above) was able to synthesize an overview of how each stakeholder group experienced the PARCC assessment. This synthesis and continued processing included comment counts, broken down by participant role, within each affinity grouping as well, allowing for a clear picture of the scope of each identified issue. Each section of the report identifies overall comment totals and a full table of comment counts can be found below.

This synthesis will allow the NJDOE to see PARCC in a practical context and to better understand designer bias and assumption and separates the theoretical from the actual.

Findings

Throughout the **Stakeholder Interview (Protocol 1)** processing, it was evident that five overarching themes emerged from the data collected, with notable, yet varying, degrees of comment frequency. A full picture of overarching themes and comment frequency, by topic and role, is pictured below. Please note that in some areas, the degree of frequency of commentary on a topic exceeds the total number of participants within an identified role. Within the interview, a single stakeholder may have commented on a single topic more than once, indicating a sense of importance or priority on the given topic. The processing team understands the value of capturing the data as it exists, so all comments have been represented in the chart below and within the report.

	Educators	Parents / Caregivers	Students	Other Interested Stakeholders	Total Comments
Theme 1: Relevance	233	74	107	13	427
PARCC Utility: Design, Delivery, and Data	186	74	84	13	357
- Utility and Design	57	34	50	6	147
- Design Bias	18	0	0	0	18
- Technology	56	8	12	7	83
- Testing Time	31	32	21	0	84
- Pearson	18	0	0	0	18
- PARCC Data	6	0	1	0	7
Authentic Assessment	47	0	23	0	70

² Stakeholder Interview Process - Otto Scharmer, MIT - <https://www.presencing.org/#/resource/tools/stakeholder-interview-desc>

³ Affinity Mapping Process - General Assembly Design - <https://generalassembly.ly/design/user-experience-design/affinity-mapping>

Theme 2: Impact on Curriculum and Instruction	123	33	56	5	217
- Impact on Curriculum	82	33	27	2	144
- Lost Instructional Time	35	0	28	3	66
- Logistics	6	0	1	0	7
Theme 3: High-Stakes Decisions	88	39	55	2	184
<i>Tying Teacher Evaluation to Student Performance</i>	59	8	25	0	92
-Teacher Evaluation	46	8	3	0	57
-Student Effort	13	0	22	0	35
<i>Tying Student Graduation to PARCC</i>	29	31	30	2	92
- Graduation Requirement	13	15	30	2	60
- Opting Out	16	16	0	0	32
Theme 4: Mental Health Implications	61	30	85	4	180
- Frustration, Stress, Anxiety	41	30	85	4	160
- Student Sense of Self	20	0	0	0	20
Theme 5: Serving All Students	54	12	7	3	76
-Special Education	42	12	7	3	64
- English Language Learners	12	0	0	0	12

Theme 1: Relevance (427 Comments)

Test relevance was a primary concern among all participant groups. Respondents indicated significant flaws in the design, delivery, data reporting, and overall utility of the PARCC assessment and pushed for an authentic assessment system that would be relevant to students, teachers, and parents/caregivers alike.

PARCC Utility: Design, Delivery, and Data (357 Comments)

Participants expressed that PARCC is a “broken system” and “designed for failure” in that it is irrelevant, inauthentic, developmentally inappropriate, and excessively time-consuming.

Educators, parents/caregivers, and students question the purpose and utility of PARCC, sharing that the assessment and resulting data are not useful to them and do not assist in growing student knowledge, skill, and understanding. Students specifically expressed the need for their teachers to see data that reflect where each student stands, in both specific strengths and areas of opportunity.

Educators asserted that performance on the PARCC does not reflect true performance or skill mastery in ways that other forms of authentic assessment can. Primary PARCC design concerns were raised over the developmental appropriateness and validity of the assessment, indicating that due to the timing of PARCC administration, the assessment places too much emphasis on skills that have yet to be taught. Further concerns were communicated regarding the necessity of student adeptness with technology. There was concern that PARCC assessments require students to read well above grade level, and, therefore, cannot accurately measure one’s ability.

Commentary on PARCC test content, by educators, parents/caregivers, and other stakeholders highlighted concerns over the inherent bias in PARCC testing. Educators and parents/caregivers reported that historically

marginalized children are discriminated against because the assessment doesn't connect to student lived experience, including those of students not bound for college. One educator said, "Achievement happens when you focus on equity," but the PARCC test doesn't equitably assess all students.

PARCC is administered for a minimum of 7.75 hours per year in elementary school and nine hours per year in high school, across a series of days. All participant groups expressed frustration and disapproval with the time required for PARCC testing. Students and educators communicated that "PARCC shuts down our schools" and "all learning stops" during test administration time frames, which can extend up to eight weeks, because of limited access to technology and schedule changes.

The assessment is delivered to students via the web-based Pearson TestNav system, accessible by computers and tablets. Students and educators voiced remarkable discontent with the use of technology for the PARCC, noting software glitches and server crashes resulting in lost portions of the assessment and the need for makeup testing, math tools that are not user-friendly, and frustrations with screen reading, including the inability to have readings and questions side-by-side on the screen. The desire for a paper and pencil option was expressed by multiple participants, across roles. A number of educators, parents/caregivers, and students commented on the negative correlation between administering the assessment on the computer and student effort exhibited when taking the assessment. A high school student who juggles an Advanced Placement course load said, "It is difficult to take the test on the computer because I find myself zoning out and getting distracted by the screen."

PARCC data reports are released in the fall of the school year *following* testing, more than five months after students have taken the assessment. Educators, parents/caregivers, students and other interested stakeholders assert the data are "useless" to them as the reports are not timely, and the feedback lacks the specificity needed to inform instruction or academic growth.

Throughout the sessions, it was evident that a clear disconnect exists between the NJDOE's perception of the value and utility of PARCC data reports and how these reports are received and used by schools, parents/caregivers, and students in reality. In a particular instance with high school students, a representative from the NJDOE offered that the PARCC offers "rich reports," so students may use the data provided to "not only understand your strengths, but get a sense of your weaknesses." This representative continued to explain how the reports could be used by students to "plan their academic growth." When asked for their thoughts, students expressed that they never saw the reports, but that their parents/caregivers might look at them. One particular student stated, "I checked to see if I passed, but never looked at any info beyond that" and was met with nods and affirming comments from her peers. The final noteworthy takeaway pertains to data privacy—educators, parents/caregivers, and students expressed concern over how the data are used, where student data are stored and how data are secured.

Few positive comments were voiced during the meetings. Comments in support of current practices included that with the onset of PARCC, schools were required to purchase sufficient technology, resulting in greater access to technology throughout the school year. The remaining supportive comments were made by participants categorized as other stakeholders and included a reduction in technological issues, a positive review of Pearson's customer support, and that "Professional Learning Communities are collaboratively reviewing data to discern strengths and weaknesses, best practices, and student needs to improve curriculum." Finally, one respondent expressed support for testing on the computer as it helps those students "with bad penmanship."

“Imagine being the coach of a football team. When your team plays the game, you are forbidden to watch. You cannot know what went wrong or what went right. You only hear the final score, months later. This is what PARCC is like for teachers.” - NJ Educator

“The thing that bothers me the most is that these tests mainly benefit the company producing the test. Because of that, it might not be assessing me on the subjects I am actually learning or supposed to be learning. I do respect the idea of having a test to help me see where I am and where I need to go.” - 10th grade student

Authentic Assessment (70 Comments)

Educators and students acknowledged that PARCC “doesn’t test what students actually need” and indicated the urgency for authentic assessment. Students said that testing needed to be “relevant to our future—college *or* career,” as opposed to the current system of statewide assessment. Educators shared that assessment needs to have a clear purpose in order to be effective. “Assessment needs to be meaningful and have a way to address learning needs—PARCC doesn’t do that,” noted one educator. In addition, educators expressed that their priorities lie in reducing the amount of standardized assessment that does not fuel further learning.

Participants expressed support for teacher-created and teacher-graded portfolios or other forms of performance-based assessment where students have the opportunity to demonstrate knowledge, skills, and understanding that reflects the “real world” and “future careers.” Educators and students alike hoped to see a “fair” and “broad” assessment system that respects and reflects the development of the “whole child.”

“Assessment is “about meeting students where they are and providing opportunities for them to feel that they can go further.” - Parent

Theme #2: Impact on Curriculum and Instruction (217 Comments)

PARCC has a deep impact on curriculum and instruction in both tested grade levels and nontested grade levels. Participants representing each role agree that PARCC had a negative impact on curriculum and instructional time in the classroom, as well as with the logistics surrounding the broader system of curriculum and instruction in the school and district.

The PARCC implementation calendar greatly constrain the curricula, resulting in a coverage of content model as opposed to a model focused on meeting students where they are, enhancing competency development, and deepening student understanding. Educators, parents/caregivers, students, and other interested stakeholders share that in addition to having to address the curriculum at a “frantic pace” to expose students to 10 months of curricular materials in eight months’ time, the curriculum is further diminished by the infusion of PARCC test prep, practice tests, and time dedicated to learning and practicing with the technological tools required by the Pearson TestNav system.

Educators share that schools are under extreme administrative pressure to teach to the test, “killing” creativity, autonomy, and student engagement. Further, elementary and middle school educators express that significant emphasis is placed on the tested content areas—math and English language arts—resulting in a de-emphasis on and time cut from science, social studies, etc. and special areas such as art, music, and electives. Because of the pressures of the system and impact on curriculum and instruction, students feel “abandoned to self-teach” in areas that are of true value and interest to them.

Educators, students, and other interested stakeholders reveal that PARCC significantly alters schedules, changes routines, and halts all learning for weeks at a time. The logistics surrounding the system of curriculum and instruction are greatly affected by these disruptions. Resources and support are removed from classrooms leading up to, during, and following the test administration windows so that technology can be configured for testing and testing environments can be stripped of instructional displays, posters, etc. According to the PARCC 2018 Test Administration Manual, the following are prohibited in testing environments (i.e., classrooms) during the test: “Any resource (e.g., books, posters, models, displays, teaching aids) that defines, explains, illustrates terminology or concepts, or otherwise provides unauthorized assistance during testing.”⁴ In reality, this results in nearly all materials being removed from the walls of classrooms, creating a sterile, institution-like testing environment.

Participants reported that in many schools, districts operate on an abbreviated schedule during PARCC administration, resulting in a lack of consistency in class meeting times. This was of particular frustration to Advanced Placement students who stated that the timing of the PARCC and schedule adjustments prevented them from more effectively preparing for the AP tests, which were scheduled to be administered right on the heels of PARCC testing.

*“I’m upset to be missing out on what I should actually be learning.”
HS Student*

“Our children are so smart, there’s so much they can do... we have amazing children. They can do art, music, but we overlook who they are for prep, prep, prep.” - Parent

⁴ PARCC 2018 Spring Computer-Based Testing Test Administrator Manual - Retrieved from: <http://www.nj.gov/education/assessment/district/Spring18Grade3HSCBTAM.pdf>

Theme #3: High-Stakes Decisions (184 Comments)

Despite the fact that there is no federal mandate to do so, the state of New Jersey has tied PARCC to high-stakes' decisions affecting educators, students and families. High school students must meet high school assessment requirements in order to be eligible to graduate. While the classes of 2018 and 2019 have various assessment pathways to graduate, students in the Class of 2020 must take all 6 PARCC assessments before they are eligible to use an alternative pathway to fulfill the state mandated requirement. As of the time of this report, these transitional pathways will soon expire, leaving the Class of 2021 to take all six PARCC assessments and pass the PARCC Algebra I and ELA Grade 10 assessments. If these students are unsuccessful on the identified assessments, their final chance for graduation requires them to submit a portfolio appeal to the NJDOE. Based on the data reported to date, current passing rates for PARCC ELA 10 and the PARCC Algebra I assessments are 46 percent and 42 percent. Without a change to the graduation requirements, the state of New Jersey will be facing a [graduation crisis](#). High-stakes decisions affect teachers as well. Currently, 30 percent of a Grade 3-8 tested-area teacher's annual evaluation score hinges upon his/her student's performance on the PARCC assessment.

“My future education is at stake due to a test's ability to judge my intellect.” - HS Student

Student Graduation Tied to PARCC (92 Comments)

All represented groups are in agreement on two primary areas related to student graduation tied to PARCC - there is extreme opposition to this state mandate and participants overwhelmingly indicate that the NJDOE needs to provide clear, direct, and timely information to schools, students, and families.

Educators, parents/caregivers, students, and other interested stakeholders assert that requiring students to take all six PARCC assessments is “unfair” and “too much.” Students state that the requirement “forces students who have passed in ninth grade to take a meaningless test in 10th and 11th grades” and that the graduation requirement is the only reason to take the PARCC.

Students would prefer to take the SAT assessments instead of PARCC, as they see the SAT's utility and many “are taking it anyway.” While parents/caregivers and other interested stakeholders offer that there should be a variety of graduation assessment options, including the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB).

Finally, teachers, parents/caregivers, and students feel that taking or refusing the PARCC should be the parents'/caregivers' decision to make. With the graduation requirement, the state has taken this right away from parents/caregivers and places them in the difficult position of forcing their child(ren) to take an assessment parents'/caregivers see as not in their child(ren)'s best interests.

Teacher Evaluation Tied to Student Performance (92 Comments)

Participants from all represented groups voiced that tying teacher evaluation to student performance on PARCC was “unfair” and “invalid.” They further explained that the system creates inequity among teachers because that this aspect of the evaluation system only pertains to teachers in tested subject areas/grade levels and tends to have a more negative impact on teachers of special education students, bilingual students, and historically marginalized students.

Further, students are the only group that heavily remarked upon the effort they put forth on the assessment. Many students indicated that they put forth little to no effort on the test, because it is “meaningless” to them. Many indicated that they sleep through the test, “click through”, or finish as quickly as possible. A student is noted as saying, “students don't try on the test, so it shouldn't reflect on the teachers.”

The “other stakeholder” group argued that teachers “have a difficult job” and that there is a strong evaluation system in place without tying performance to PARCC. The use of the median Student Growth Percentile (mSGP) creates divisiveness and is “not fair—education should be a team effort.”

Theme #4: Mental Health Implications (180 Comments)

Educators, parents/caregivers, students, and other stakeholders identify firsthand evidence of the mental health implications the current statewide assessment system has upon students. While mental health implications represent the fourth theme rising out of the stakeholder interviews, it is important to note that this issue **ranks #1 in frequency for students**, representing the majority of student comments.

All represented roles identify the high levels of stress that the PARCC puts upon students, teachers, parents, and others (namely, administrators). Teachers indicate that the test brings high anxiety for students. One educator identified a noticeable shift in students: “During PARCC, it’s a different kind of child—they’re stressed, disheveled, exhausted.” It was commonly pointed out that the anxiety, stress, and frustration with the PARCC pushes students to a limit: “I’ve seen children literally break down from the testing.” This limit can physically manifest as students “giving up on the PARCC” or not taking the assessment seriously.

Educators explain that the PARCC can be incredibly demoralizing to students and have witnessed students “feeling stupid,” losing confidence, and not eating during the PARCC testing window as a result of the PARCC administration. Parents indicate that their children have difficulty handling the stress that PARCC imposes upon them, experiencing sleeplessness and frustration. This stress extends to the adults as well. Educators commonly noted the stress and anxiety PARCC places upon them as well, while representatives from the other stakeholder role (namely, a school administrator) shared the impact that PARCC preparation and administration has had on her—“I have not slept for a month and a half.”

Teachers and students express that the stress, frustration, and anxiety from PARCC have “killed” joy, creativity, and learning in the schools. Students and teachers feel categorized by their students’ testing performance and other interested stakeholders hope that the state will “look for other ways to assess to reduce stress.”

Within this category, a single comment was made relative to the positive impact on student mental health, noting that PARCC increases student self-confidence for high performers.

“My students are so anxious – they have failed before they have even started.” - NJ Educator

“Every year I show up, stare at a computer for hours, and end up failing despite my best efforts.” - HS Student

Theme #5: Serving All Students (76 Comments)

Comments reflecting the need for an assessment system that serves all students, including students with special education needs and English language learners (ELLs), make up the final overarching theme within the data findings.

Each student with identified special education needs has a Individualized Education Plan (IEP) that guides the educational program, accommodations and modifications needed for the student to experience success. However, educators, parents/caregivers, students and other stakeholders indicate that the accommodations and modifications in an individual’s IEP cannot universally be applied in PARCC testing. Participants indicate that this has a negative impact on special education students, who become overwhelmed and frustrated when the rules that apply in their day to day learning are off the table during PARCC. Parents, students, and other interested stakeholders note that the testing structure and content is biased against students with disabilities and those who learn differently.

Reflections pertaining to ELLs highlight that the assessment system does not acknowledge or recognize the time it takes for ELLs to reach language fluency. Teachers state that the PARCC is “completely biased” against ELLs and fails to measure what students truly know and understand due to the language barrier. Educators also acknowledge that the PARCC process is very demoralizing to ELL students who are required to take the PARCC within one year of being in the country. Finally, while some testing accommodations are available to ELLs, these accommodations do not address the language barrier.

“I have an IEP, but extra time on a standardized test isn’t what I need. I need a different way to show you I know this stuff.” - Student

Moving Forward

Throughout the stakeholder interview process, educators, parents/caregivers, students, and other interested stakeholders had the ability to share their lived experiences with and perspectives on PARCC. In addition to the various themes that emerged from the participant comments and reflections, a fair number of hopes for moving forward were expressed. Participants clearly hope for:

- An assessment with a clear purpose and transparent expectations.
- A “fair test” that addresses student needs at all levels.
- A meaningful and valid assessment that involves and respects educators and students in the development process.
- A system that celebrates and advocates for continued student growth through timely, specific, and user-friendly feedback.
- A true partnership with the NJDOE, where educator, parent, student, and other stakeholder perspectives are heard, valued, and represented in our education system.

“As an educator, my hope is for **FAIRNESS** in testing. I hope the NJDOE takes all comments seriously and with respect.” - NJ Educator

Protocol #2: Journey Mapping

Process Purpose and Overview

The Journey Mapping protocol⁵ allows one to gain a clearer understanding of the lived experiences of students, educators and families throughout a cycle of PARCC administration. This protocol broke participants down into role-alike groups and called for them to identify what one might not only “see and hear” but also “feel” at three specific points in the PARCC administration cycle—the weeks leading up to PARCC testing, during PARCC testing, and the weeks after PARCC testing.

Teacher Journey Map

- “If I were to shadow you, the educator, **in the weeks leading up to** the PARCC assessment, what would I see and hear? What would I feel? What thoughts would linger with me?”
- “If I were to shadow you, the educator, **during** the PARCC assessment, what would I see and hear? What would I feel? What thoughts would linger with me?”
- “If I were to shadow you, the educator, **in the weeks following** the PARCC assessment, what would I see and hear? What would I feel? What thoughts would linger with me?”

Student Journey Map

- “If I were to shadow you, the student, **in the weeks leading up to** the PARCC assessment, what would I see and hear? What would I feel? What thoughts would linger with me?”
- “If I were to shadow you, the student, **during** the PARCC assessment, what would I see and hear? What would I feel? What thoughts would linger with me?”
- “If I were to shadow you, the student, **in the weeks following** the PARCC assessment, what would I see and hear? What would I feel? What thoughts would linger with me?”

Parent Journey Map

- “If I were to shadow your child **in the weeks leading up to** the PARCC assessment, what would I see and hear? What would I feel? What thoughts would linger with me?”
- “If I were to shadow your child **during** the PARCC assessment, what would I see and hear? What would I feel? What thoughts would linger with me?”
- “If I were to shadow your child **in the weeks following** the PARCC assessment, what would I see and hear? What would I feel? What thoughts would linger with me?”

See the journey map infographics on the the following pages.

⁵ Stickdorn. (2010). *This is Service Design Thinking*



PARCC Teacher Journey

BEFORE PARCC

Curriculum and Instruction

In the weeks leading up to PARCC administration, school and classroom routines begin to shift. More time is dedicated to cramming in information for the test because it is administered before the end of the school year. Test prep begins to take more time, both during and after school. The shifting routines result in a loss of valuable teaching time in exchange for preparing students to take the PARCC test.

Student Mental Health

In the weeks leading up to administration, educators begin to focus on students' mental health—managing student anxiety over the test, frustration over the shifting schedule, and waning engagement with the emphasis on learning PARCC software, practice testing, and test prep. This ranges from interpersonal reassurances, counseling, and encouragement to PARCC pep rallies.

Technology

While PARCC has brought more technology into schools, the technology gets sequestered in the weeks leading up to the test. As much as one month prior to administration, IT departments take the technology away to configure it for testing. This coincides with the optimal time to teach students how to use the technology effectively on the test, leading to frustration. It also constrains educators who have built classroom routines and differentiation around modern technology.

School Disruption

Managing refusal requests, schedule changes, school technology, and space availability are disruptive to school. These disruptions affect educator planning, course consistency, class meeting days and times, access to resources, and considerable lost instructional time. Additionally, the classroom environment is disrupted as teachers are required to remove any posters and informational materials with content-specific tips, formulas, etc. resulting in bare walls and sterile classroom environments.

DURING PARCC

Impact on Time

On days when PARCC is administered, learning time is affected before, during, and after test administration. Half of the day is dedicated to completing the test and the students are either physically exhausted or disengaged after testing. In many cases, students are forced to sit and do nothing due to early PARCC section completion or test refusal. Nontesting classrooms are also disrupted because they must be quiet to not disrupt nearby testing classrooms and they cannot access resources like technology or the library.

Conflicted Process

Educators are supporting and encouraging students through an experience that both educators and students know has no personal meaning, value, or purpose to students as individuals. Further, the educators have no authority to make the test or testing experience more relevant to their students. Educators expressed significant concerns with technology: "breakdown of equipment and internet" as well as suboptimal testing conditions such as a "gym with 120 students on laptops," creating additional hurdles to success.

Exhibited Effort

During testing, educators express that many students do not exhibit effort on the PARCC. Students are observed simply "clicking through" the test, surrendering quickly due to frustration, and frequently "going to sleep" instead of exerting best effort on the PARCC assessment.

Continued Testing

In the weeks after PARCC, there is little reprieve from testing. At all levels, teachers are preparing students for final assessments, benchmarks, and the state-required science standardized assessments. Additionally, many high school teachers are preparing their students for AP testing. There is immense frustration because PARCC undermines the teachers' ability to fully prepare their students for these other tests that are more immediately relevant and significant to students and teachers alike.

Continued Disruption

Immediately following PARCC administration, technology and other resources are still not available for classroom use, as schools must undergo makeup testing. Students are pulled from classes to complete makeup PARCC assessments, further disrupting classroom instructional time, curricular timelines, and class schedules. Libraries and resources remain inaccessible throughout this time frame. Student services may be disrupted (child study team, guidance counselor or access) due to the need for proctoring.

Repairing the System

PARCC is such a focal point and heavy emphasis for schools that its completion leaves students with a sense that the school year has ended. This, coupled with the timing of test administration, creates a situation where teachers need to re-establish the classroom culture of teaching, learning, and productivity. PARCC's timing creates the impression that the "year is over" among students while simultaneously creating a sense of frustration and urgency for teachers to overcome this faulty impression.

The prevailing educator feelings during this time are **frustration, anxiety, stress, anger, and confusion.**

The prevailing educator feelings during this time are **stress and frustration** followed by **exhaustion and discouragement.**

The prevailing educator feelings during this time are **relief, yet exhaustion; frustration and an urgency to make up for lost time.**



PARCC timing constrains the curriculum, resulting in:

- Teaching to the test.
- A coverage model over a focus on developing deep understanding.
- A focus on PARCC skill development over competency development.



The test creates an anxious time for teachers that creates anxiety in students.

"I believe in assessments, but not at the expense of my students' mental health."
- NJ Educator



Tech configuration disrupts both normal teaching and the ability to fully prepare students to navigate the testing software.



School routines and schedules are halted, making school unpredictable for students and teachers alike. This greatly affects teacher planning and school culture.



PARCC affects learning time by constraining available minutes for teaching, diminishing a student's willingness to learn, altering the surrounding learning environment, and reducing the availability of resources such as technology and spaces. PARCC administration affects those not testing as well.

"Sorry - no gym, music, art, or recess again because the big kids are testing." - NJ Educator



PARCC forces teachers to advocate for a process that has little perceived value to either teachers or students as individuals. This forced disingenuousness has a negative impact upon how teachers see themselves.

"This is not why I became a teacher."
- NJ Educator



PARCC imposes an overly strict culture upon the school during its administration. Students become frustrated and overwhelmed by the experience; many are seen shutting down and giving up.



PARCC is immediately followed by final exams and AP testing. PARCC testing is seen as an irrelevant exercise interfering with more personally relevant activities.



PARCC causes lingering disruption post-administration as resources are tied up for make up testing and inventorying while service providers are pulled to proctor.



The timing and taxing nature of the PARCC has a lasting impact on the remainder of the school year.

"PARCC frustrates my students so much that some lose hope and give up for the rest of the school year." - NJ Educator



PARCC Student Journey

BEFORE PARCC

DURING PARCC

AFTER PARCC

Disparate Experiences with Curriculum and Instruction

Students described different experiences with PARCC depending upon their academic placement. Students in AP courses stated that nothing changes for them in the weeks leading up to PARCC. College Prep students, however, described a time of significant, rote test prep. Students not yet in high school universally cited extensive test prep in the weeks leading to PARCC. Those in AP classes expressed dread at the boredom of testing days, while those in college prep courses expressed stress and exhaustion.

Student Mental Health

Students subjected to test prep stated that they experienced stress, exhaustion, burn out, and shame. There were a number of comments about complaining during this time because of both the stress and the desire to do more personally relevant work. "Rushing through practice tests to do other work for grades."

"Disappointed in Us"

Students explicitly stated that they were "disappointing" the adults through their lack of effort, apathy toward, or poor preparation for PARCC. Students demonstrated a perception that PARCC has value to the adults, yet little personal value for students. This led students to believe their behavior and feelings toward PARCC would "disappoint" the adults in their lives.

Effort

Students overwhelmingly described a lack of effort, citing peers randomly clicking through answers and others finishing as quickly as possible so that they could spend the remainder of test administration time sleeping.

Strict Atmosphere

Students described PARCC administration as a time of strict control. Students are forced to be silent, even after they have completed the test. While they are permitted to sleep, sit quietly, or read a novel, students are prohibited from studying, reviewing notes, or completing work for their classes. Many would like a break once they are finished with the test.

Emotional Impact

A small minority of responses cited taking the PARCC in earnest. These students described their experience as frustrating and confusing. Multiple responses cited crying and "loud sobs" followed by worry about their performance. Some stated, "Eventually, I stop caring."

Continued Testing

The students in AP classes described the time post-PARCC as one of increasing stress due to looming AP tests. They see these tests as more personally relevant and resent being forced to spend a week on the PARCC test.

Relief

A set of students stated that they were relieved after PARCC administration. They were happy to return to a normal schedule where they understood what was going on in class and could interact with their friends.

Burnout

A set of students expressed a diminished ability to continue school work because they felt so burned out from PARCC. Students described themselves as "tired; feeling dead." Following the PARCC, students stated that they discussed PARCC questions, how they answered them, poorly constructed questions, how "dumb" they felt, and concern over performance.

The prevailing student feelings during this time are **apathy, stress, and exhaustion.**

The prevailing student feelings during this time are **boredom, frustration, and tiredness.**

The prevailing student feelings during this time are **stress, aggravation, resentment; relief.**



Students expressed extreme differences in their experiences, based upon their course placement.

"All of the students look sad and stressed" versus "No one cares. Everyone just wants to get it done with. Sweet half days."



Students shared a great deal of comments regarding the impact PARCC has upon their mental health.

"I'm going to drop out."



Many students commonly expressed the perception that they are disappointing the adults.

"You would be disappointed in my lack of preparation for PARCC."



Student commonly expressed a lack of effort on the assessment.

"Take five minutes on test, fall asleep for three hours."



Students dislike the impact PARCC implementation has on the school atmosphere and wish their time could be used more productively.

"School feels like punishment."



PARCC has an extreme impact on student emotions, for those who take the test seriously. The Journey Maps were riddled with "I'm going to drop out" quotes.



Students are fed up with the amount of testing that occurs throughout the year. They see the value in some tests, but not in others.

"AP tests are coming fast, and we just wasted a whole week."



Students experience relief after the conclusion of the PARCC and are pleased to get back to their normal routine.

"Thank God they're done."



For some students, the pressure and emphasis on PARCC results in burnout and resignation.

"My brain has officially stopped processing."



PARCC Parent Journey

BEFORE PARCC

Curricular Impact

Parents expressed significant frustration over the impact PARCC has upon curriculum. Parents shared experiences with physical education and special electives being suspended for PARCC preparation prior to test administration, students being enrolled in courses beneath their ability (solely due to PARCC performance), and aggravation over test prep during the weeks prior to PARCC administration. Parents with students who are both tested and not tested noted that the nontested children do not experience any of the frustrating practices.

Strained Parent/Child Relationships

Parents described strained relationships with their children in the weeks leading up to PARCC. The children exhibit uncharacteristically "snappy," "frustrated," and "anxious" behavior during this time. Children demonstrate resentment towards their parents when parents do not refuse the test. This stands in contrast to students in untested areas or those refusing PARCC. These children were described as relaxed with regard to how they interacted with their parents.

Resentment/Confusion Over Graduation

Parents expressed extreme disagreement with and a lack of understanding of the graduation requirements, stating that the NJDOE's requirements were "unclear" and a "moving target." This confusion, paired with the emotional impact PARCC has upon their children, has resulted in feelings of resentment over PARCC as a graduation requirement.

DURING PARCC

Use of Time

Parents questioned the utility of the PARCC exam, citing reports from children that they had yet to learn some of the material, experienced technology issues, witnessed the stress of some test takers and the apathy of others. Parents stated that they feel the data is "useless" and question why their tax dollars are spent on this. After the tests, parents report that learning does not resume for the rest of the day.

Emotional Impact

Parents expressed a sense of guilt at subjecting their children to an assessment that made them feel inadequate, yet served no purpose for them personally. Parents feel trapped over the confusion of whether opting out will harm their child's ability to graduate. Students are also subjected to more rigid discipline during this time.

AFTER PARCC

Return to Normalcy

Parents described a collective sigh of relief from their children over the conclusion of PARCC. Children are "eager and happy to do something again." The learning environment is described as shifting towards being more project-centric.

Continued Resentment

Parents still feel PARCC served no purpose for their children, citing the impact PARCC testing had upon family life, their children's emotional well-being, and the learning environment. This left parents with a desire to hold someone accountable for the PARCC experience.

The prevailing parental feelings during this time are **annoyance, confusion, and resentment.**

The prevailing parental feelings during this time are **guilt and frustration.**

The prevailing parental feelings during this time are **relief and anger.**



Parents dislike the curricular changes due to the constrained schedule.

"Our school district no longer incorporates novels in English class, only excerpts. As a parent, I was told, 'curriculum mirrors PARCC—no novels, just excerpts, like the test.'"

- Parent



Parents resent the strain PARCC causes on relationships with their children. Parents feel stuck - they want to advocate for their children's best interests, yet know their children are forced to take the PARCC in order to graduate.

"My children are at stake."

- Parent



Parents feel confused by lack of clarity over New Jersey's PARCC graduation requirements and fear for their children's futures. This exacerbates resentment towards PARCC.

"PARCC has got to change—the damage is to the community as well as the school."

- Parent



Parents see all of the variables that undermine PARCC as a viable data source and question why significant time and resources are spent on the PARCC assessment.

"I hope they come up with a more equitable assessment—one that makes a student eager to know their progress, with scores easier to read, and suggestions for parents and teachers."

- Parent



Parents see PARCC as harmful to their child personally and emotionally, yet powerless to do anything about it, because of state mandates.

"Why are we subjecting our kids to these kinds of tests?"

- Parent



Parents are relieved to see their children happy to go to school once again.

"My daughter's eyes light up to have art class back."

- Parent



Parents want to hold someone accountable for subjecting their children and families to PARCC testing.

"Who thought this was a good idea and approved this disaster?"

- Parent

Protocol #3: Experiences with Authentic Assessment

Process Purpose and Overview

The purpose of the third and final protocol was for participants to consider assessment in authentic and relevant terms. Insights from these reflections should be used to consider the potential for relevant and authentic assessment throughout our statewide assessment system. This protocol brought participants together in role-alike groups and prompted them to consider authentic and relevant assessment that continually fuels growth. Participants were asked to provide a single response to each of the following questions:

1. What are you good at?
2. How do you know?
3. How might you prove it?
4. How might you continually get better?

Outcomes and Insights

While each respondent considered themselves to be “good” at vastly different things, ranging from traditional “school subjects” to hobbies and other skills, there was a high degree of consistency among all participant responses to prompts #2 through #4. The themes reflected in the responses are laid out in the following chart. Responses to prompt #1 have not been included, as this information is not relevant to the overriding message that is communicated through this data:

Prompt #2: How do you know?	Prompt #3: How might you prove it?	Prompt #4: How might you continually get better?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I practice and invest a lot of time in _____ • I’m competitive with others who are “good” at _____ • I’m engaged in and energized by _____ • Others recognize my work • I receive positive and constructive feedback from others • Others seek advice from me or look to me as a guide on _____ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can demonstrate my skills • I can perform _____ • I can show you • I can teach others • I can provide evidence from different points/show you a portfolio of success • I can explain my strengths and areas where I have opportunity to improve • I have consistent results • “I would not prove it with a test.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I would keep practicing! • I would look to high-quality models and emulate them • I would self-reflect, self-assess, and set higher goals • I would continue to deepen my knowledge and understanding • I would focus on my deficits • I would seek critical feedback • I would challenge myself

While this is of no surprise, it is interesting to note how **infrequently** our formal assessment systems reflect what we know about authentic assessment.

Conclusion

On the whole, participants expressed gratitude that the NJDOE was working with NJEA throughout this work and expressed appreciation for allowing their voices to be heard and to inform this process.

NJEA has shared their findings with the NJDOE and will continue to collaborate with the department in order to influence the development of the future statewide assessment system that not only reflects high-quality assessment, but also the needs, values, and voices of educators, parents/caregivers, students, and other stakeholders.

To access this report, accompanying materials, raw data, images, and more, please visit: [njea.org/PARCCReport](https://www.nj.gov/education/assessment/outreach.shtml)

For more information on assessment from the NJDOE, including the NJDOE’s Statewide Assessment Outreach Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Next Steps document, please visit:

<https://www.nj.gov/education/assessment/outreach.shtml>

Appendices - Available Online