Guidance on Accommodations for Students with Disabilities Taking Spring 2015 PARCC Tests

In light of ongoing discussions on this topic, the Department has reposted this guidance as follows:

**Background**

For the spring 2015 statewide standardized test administration, Massachusetts districts chose either the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Career (PARCC) or the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests. Both tests measure the 2011 Massachusetts Curriculum Framework standards, but each has distinctive test administration policies, including the selection and provision of accommodations for students with disabilities. Although planning for PARCC has taken place over the past three years, many districts are focusing on this assessment for the first time. This guidance highlights selected activities needed to provide allowable test accommodations for students with disabilities.

**Key Differences Between MCAS and PARCC Accommodations**

PARCC is a different test than MCAS, with different test administration policies. Most accommodations offered on the new PARCC tests are similar to those allowed on MCAS tests. However, many of these supports will now be available to all students taking PARCC, not just to students with disabilities, and therefore do not need to be listed as an accommodation in the IEP; for example, the use of text-to-speech/human reader for the PARCC mathematics tests, the use of magnification devices, and small group or separate test settings are available to any student taking the PARCC tests. PARCC tests are intended for computer-based administration, but paper-based versions are available as an alternative. Therefore, in some cases, supports may vary according to whether a student is taking the computer- or paper-based format of the test; for example, pre-recorded “text-to-speech” will be used to read aloud the computer-based PARCC test to a student, while paper-based tests will require a human reader.

IEPs do not need to be amended simply to indicate that the student will take PARCC rather than MCAS tests since, in most cases, the accommodations listed in the IEP are comparable and permitted on PARCC and will be made available to all students upon notation on the Personal Needs Profile discussed below. To determine whether PARCC allows MCAS accommodations, please refer to the Department’s publication entitled PARCC Accessibility and Accommodations Overview for Massachusetts Educators. If an accommodation listed on a student’s IEP is not allowed for the PARCC test, then it should not be provided for the PARCC spring test administration.

As a result of PARCC test administration policies, the availability of a small number of accommodations permitted for the MCAS tests has changed; for example:

1. **Extended time:** Since PARCC tests are timed and MCAS tests are untimed, extended time will be allowed as an accommodation only for students with disabilities and English learners on PARCC. Additional time should be provided to students with disabilities and English learners on PARCC, if they need it. The “extended time” accommodation will allow a student until the end of the school day to complete a single

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1 This guidance applies only to students taking PARCC assessments, and not MCAS. No change is required for high school students taking MCAS tests; students taking MCAS science and technology engineering tests; or students in schools and districts that opted to continue with MCAS testing in 2015.
“unit” (test session). Because MCAS tests are untimed, it is quite possible that “extended time” is not currently listed as a testing accommodation in the IEPs of students who require it for PARCC testing.

The Department requires that “extended time” be made available to students with disabilities who need it without requiring an IEP amendment, for spring 2015 testing only.

Prior to the spring 2015 test administration, districts should notify parents in writing that the student will receive extended time on the PARCC tests this spring; and that the extended time accommodation for PARCC will be discussed for inclusion in IEPs during the next regularly scheduled IEP Team meeting, if the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) adopts PARCC in fall 2015.

The Department’s sample parent letter may be adapted for the purpose of notifying parents.

Students with disabilities who have a 504 plan and English learners may also receive extended time in spring 2015. This information should be documented in plans (or otherwise documented in writing for English learners) prior to 2016 PARCC testing, if the BESE adopts PARCC in fall 2015.

Districts must also indicate “extended time” on each student’s Personal Needs Profile (PNP)\(^2\) for any student who will be provided with this accommodation on 2015 PARCC tests.

2. Taking a paper version of the PARCC test, if unable to use a computer: In schools that are administering computer-based PARCC tests, students who are unable to use a computer to take the PARCC test due to a disability or lack of familiarity with technology are eligible to take a paper-based PARCC test instead.

Paper versions of the PARCC test should be made available to students with disabilities who need them without requiring an IEP amendment, for spring 2015 testing only.

Prior to the spring 2015 test administration, districts should notify parents in writing that the student will take a paper version of the PARCC tests this spring in a school or program in which other students are taking the computer-based test; and that the paper-based test accommodation for PARCC will be discussed for inclusion in IEPs and/or 504 plans in the next regularly scheduled IEP Team meeting, if the BESE adopts PARCC in fall 2015.

The Department’s sample parent letter may be adapted for the purpose of notifying parents.

If a paper test was not previously requested for the student during the Student Registration process in December 2014, districts must request a paper test for the student using the PARCC additional orders process (available on March 2).

3. Department-approved graphic organizers and individualized mathematics reference sheets are accommodations approved specifically for MCAS, and are not allowed according to PARCC test administration policies.\(^3\) The guidelines for development and approval of graphic organizers and

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\(^2\) The Personal Needs Profile is a database that lists the supports (i.e., accessibility features, accommodations, and test administration considerations) needed by each student on the PARCC assessments, for review, verification, and/or modification by districts. Only selected supports (i.e., not all supports that are actually available on PARCC) are listed in the PNP.

\(^3\) Note that this is consistent with the Department’s Requirements for the Participation of Students with Disabilities in MCAS (see page 8). Accommodations may not contradict test administration requirements or it will result in a violation of test security and/or the invalidation of test results.
individualized mathematics reference sheets for MCAS do not transfer to PARCC, and their use would yield test results that are incomparable with results of other students, resulting in an invalid score.

The graphic organizer and individualized mathematics reference sheet accommodations are not authorized by PARCC test administration policies and should not be provided for PARCC tests.

If a current IEP indicates that the student will use a graphic organizer or an individualized mathematics reference sheet for MCAS testing, districts should notify parents of those students in writing prior to spring 2015 testing, explaining that these MCAS test accommodations in the student’s IEP are not applicable to the PARCC test administration and therefore, will not be provided on PARCC tests; and that this accommodation will not be included in future IEPs for students taking PARCC tests, though it will continue to be available for students taking MCAS tests.

The Department’s sample parent letter may be adapted for the purpose of notifying parents.

Students who need a mathematics reference sheet may use the standard PARCC mathematics reference sheets that will be given to all students in grades 5 and above.

Current ELA graphic organizers approved for use on MCAS will not be useful to students and should not be used on PARCC, since PARCC ELA/Literacy and MCAS ELA tests are quite different. All students will be provided with blank paper on which they may construct their own graphic organizer or mathematical reference sheet from memory, if desired. However, the graphic organizers approved for MCAS could mislead students to give incorrect responses on the PARCC ELA/Literacy test.

Further Guidance for IEP Teams

In most cases, existing IEPs should not require amendments for Spring 2015 PARCC testing. IEP Team Chairpersons should be prepared to discuss and address the PARRC testing needs of each student with a disability during his/her regularly scheduled IEP Team meeting over the course of the next year.

If the BESE determines in fall 2015 that it will adopt PARCC as its statewide assessment, then prior to spring 2016 testing, IEPs and 504 plans should be developed or amended to identify the use of extended time and/or a paper version of PARCC for the student, as appropriate; and to clarify that a graphic organizer or individualized mathematics reference sheet may remain in the IEP specifically for MCAS, but will not be allowed on PARCC tests. If the state does adopt PARCC as its statewide assessment, more detailed guidance will be made available.

Sample Generic Parent Letter

The Department has developed and posted a sample generic letter that may be used as is, or modified by the district, to notify parents prior to the Spring 2015 PARCC test administration of any changes in testing policies for PARCC that may affect their child.

We hope that this guidance is helpful. While the Department is requiring some notification to parents, please note that there is no requirement to conduct an unscheduled IEP meeting prior to spring 2015 testing, as the testing requirements for PARCC are different than MCAS and the discussion of PARCC requirements can appropriately begin during the next regularly scheduled IEP meeting. Questions on this guidance should be addressed to the Student Assessment office at 781-338-3625 or parcc@doe.mass.edu.