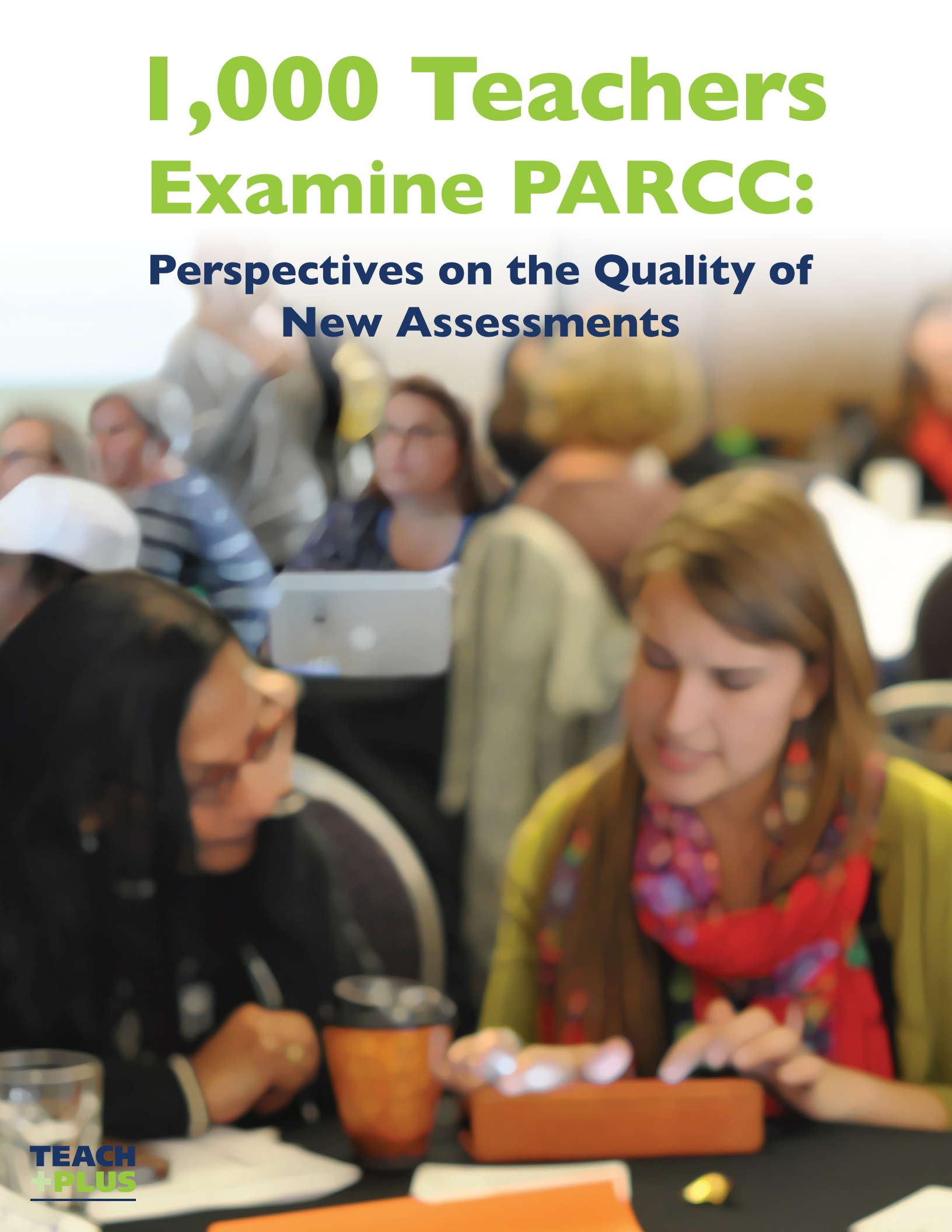
1,000 Teachers Examine PARCC:

Perspectives on the Quality of New Assessments



TEACH +PLUS

Mark Teoh, Susan Volbrecht, and Michael Savoy
Winter 2015

This Teach Plus research is supported by a generous contribution from The The Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust.

About the Authors

Mark Teoh is the Director of Research & Knowledge for Teach Plus. Prior to joining Teach Plus, he taught high school history and was a district administrator. Susan Volbrecht teaches elementary school in Chicago. She is active with *Catalyst Chicago*, serves as a committee co-chair with her union, and is a Teach Plus Teaching Policy Fellowship alumna. Michael Savoy is the National C2 Coach for Teach Plus and has taught at the middle school, high school, and college levels before joining Teach Plus.

Acknowledgments

The authors wish to acknowledge the staff at Student Achievement Partners who provided invaluable guidance and led the development of materials for the "Testing the Test" events, including Michael Briscoe, Laura Hansen, and Anna Schattauer Paillé.

The authors thank the following people for reviewing earlier versions of this report and providing invaluable feedback: Jocelyn Drakeford of The George Washington University Graduate School of Education and Human Development, Laura Hansen and Michael Briscoe of Student Achievement Partners, Rié Kijima of Stanford University, Susan Lane of the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education, Callie Riley of PARCC, Jon Star and Kari Kokka of Harvard University, and Judy Wurtzel of the Noyce Foundation.

Many Teach Plus staff helped organize and host the "Testing the Test" events as well as produce this report, including: Andrea de Azevedo, Bailey Blough, Celine Coggins, Candace Crawford, Alexandra Fren, Diane Grinnell, Anya Grottel-Brown, Josh Kaufmann, Lambrina Kless, Jennifer Kress, Christina Ross, Kristen Smith, Lindsay Sobel, Mike Stryer, Will Wiggins, and Sasha Zuflacht.

Teach Plus and the authors would like to thank the teachers who served as facilitators and presenters at "Testing the Test" events, including: Lisa Anderson, Tai Basurto, Julia Beaufait, Clare Berke, Darren Burris, Keauna Cheers, Eu Choi, Jeff Cipriani, Nate Cole, Erin Davidson, Dwight Davis, Dan DeShon, Summer Ellis, Carli Fleming, Araceli Flores, Shawn Hayes, Heather Hotchkiss, Tanika Johnson, Elizabeth Kelly, Hen Kennedy, Ben Knoeck, Erin Lane, Jennifer Larson, Wing Leung, Karen Levin, Colleen Mason, Raquel Maya, Julian McNeil, Janee Moss, Lisa Nguyen, Paige Nilson, Karen Parrino, Marjorie Pita, Katherine Poandl, Krista Rajanan, Felicia Reynolds, Lindsey Siemens, Ashley Smith, Mariko Takemoto, Rebecca Taylor, and Kylene Young.

Teach Plus and the authors would like to thank the Student Achievement Partners Core Advocates and classroom teachers, who served as facilitators at events including: Kristi Barker, Annice Brave, Amie Spies, and Rosalyn Wilson.

Finally, we wish to thank the 1,028 teachers who participated in the "Testing the Test" events for their engagement, discussion, and feedback.

About Teach Plus

The mission of Teach Plus is to improve outcomes for urban students by ensuring that a greater proportion of urban students have access to effective, experienced teachers.

TEACH PLUS

INTRODUCTION

What do teachers think about the quality of new assessments designed to measure the Common Core State Standards (CCSS)? When given the opportunity to deeply examine sample test items from Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), one of the new or next-generation assessments, what do teachers think about the test and how well it measures the knowledge and skills students must develop for college and career readiness?

To address the all-important question of the test's quality, Teach Plus brought together over 1,000 teachers in three states and the District of Columbia for an intensive day of professional development where teachers could learn more about PARCC questions, their alignment to CCSS, and the characteristics of high-quality assessments. The teachers then used this knowledge to review PARCC sample test items, discuss them with fellow teachers, and provide feedback about the quality of the test. This structured study of the test gave the teachers the opportunity to dive into PARCC in ways that teachers had been asking for. This report is based on the feedback of these teachers.

The voices of educators, like these teachers, who are highly knowledgeable about the content of the PARCC assessment, are especially important as states and districts across the country roll out the new tests.[1] Our report is organized around five key findings that emerge from the teachers' feedback about PARCC itself and concludes with suggestions on what teachers need moving forward.

Key Findings

FINDING #1: Teachers believe that PARCC is a better assessment than their prior state tests.

FINDING #2: Teachers find clear alignment between PARCC and what they are teaching.

FINDING #3: While the majority believe PARCC measures skills needed to be college- and career-ready, teachers were mixed on whether the test was grade-appropriate or too challenging.

FINDING #4: Teachers find the English Language Arts (ELA) assessment strongly aligned to the key instructional shifts of the CCSS but may require knowledge students don't yet have.

FINDING #5: Teachers find the math questions cognitively demanding and balanced among concepts, procedures and application, though they wanted to see additional questions that increase the assessment rigor.

"TESTING THE TEST" EVENTS

In the fall of 2014, Teach Plus held seven "Testing the Test" events in five locations to offer teachers an opportunity to delve deeply into PARCC test items. Highlights include:

- Events were open to all public school teachers and were held in Boston, Massachusetts; Chicago, Illinois; Nashville and Memphis, Tennessee; and Washington, D.C. from September to November 2014.
- In total, 1,028 classroom teachers participated. Teachers were provided a small honorarium for their time and expertise.
- Amongst the 1,014 survey respondents, 50 percent teach in elementary school (pre-kindergarten to grade 5), 31 percent teach in middle school (grades 6 to 8), 19 percent in high school (grades 9 to 12), and less than one percent in other grades. When asked about their teaching subjects, 38 percent responded elementary generalist, 23 percent ELA, 18 percent math, four percent science, and 17 percent other.
- Participants were invited to attend through a combination of emails sent by schools, districts, state agencies, and charter school networks in participating cities. Teachers were also informed about this opportunity through social media.
- While many of the participants (66 percent) had seen PARCC sample questions in the past, just 14 percent had field-tested PARCC with their classes during the prior spring semester.[2]
- The focus of the events was on the quality of test and not on the adequacy of the technology used to give the tests or whether the tests were being added to an already-crowded testing landscape in teachers' districts, two common issues cited by teachers.
- The events consisted of three, two hour sessions, as follows:
    - Session I was structured to ensure necessary background knowledge. Topics covered included:
        - The shifts expected by the CCSS in math and ELA.
        - The goals of next-generation assessments compared to current state tests.
        - Principles of high quality assessment developed by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and Student Achievement Partners.

      Teachers were introduced to the rubric and materials they would use to evaluate assessment quality. They were also provided the CCSS for reference. The rubric and materials were developed by current classroom teachers.[3]
    - Session II allowed time for structured analysis of PARCC test items using the CCSS and the rubric introduced in session I. Teachers worked in small, content- and grade-based groups of 5-10 participants. The sample test items were drawn directly from the PARCC website.[4] Items for analysis were divided by grade bands, and included a variety of question types and related passages. Attendees analyzed the items collaboratively with other teachers from their grade bands. Teachers recorded the results of their analyses after discussing the material with their fellow teachers.
    - Session III, the last component of the event, consisted of a whole group discussion about their general experiences preparing for actual PARCC test administration. Teachers were asked to complete a paper survey. The results from the 1,014 completed surveys were used as the data for this report.[5]

FINDING #1: Teachers believe that PARCC is a better assessment than their prior state tests.

When teachers have the opportunity to work with PARCC sample test items, what do they think of the quality of the questions? How do teachers feel PARCC compares with their previous or existing state assessments and do they believe PARCC is aligned to the CCSS or their curricula? The adoption of new assessments is an opportunity for states to provide teachers with tests that are both aligned to the CCSS and incorporate advancements in assessment that teachers will value, especially over the existing state testing systems. Teachers' reviews of PARCC sample test items are a good gauge in determining how well PARCC will do in replacing the previous or existing state tests.

Overall, the teachers who participated in this rigorous examination of PARCC sample test items believed the PARCC sample test questions to be of a higher quality than their previous state tests, which were the District of Columbia Comprehensive Assessment System (DC-CAS), the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT), the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS), and the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP).[6]

We asked teachers what they perceived of the overall quality of the PARCC sample test items when compared with the existing state test systems. We found that overall teachers viewed the PARCC sample test items favorably, with 79 percent of teachers across the three states and the District of Columbia rating the quality of the PARCC as being of higher quality than their previous state tests (see Figure 1).[7] We elaborate on the specific qualities of the PARCC test further in this report.

Figure 1

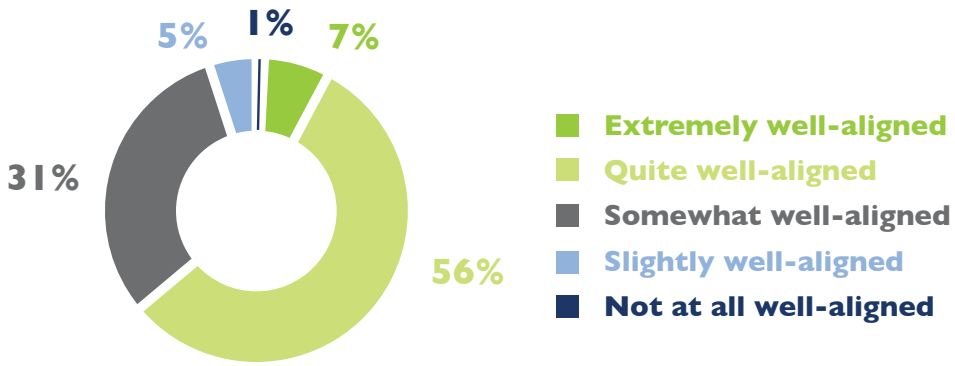
Question: "How would you rate the quality of your previous state test compared to PARCC?" (n=941)

FINDING #2: Teachers find clear alignment between PARCC and what they are teaching.

As we learned in our earlier work on assessments, one factor that teachers value highly is a clear alignment between assessments they use and the standards they teach.[8] We asked teachers how well-aligned they thought the PARCC test items were to the CCSS. We found that most teachers, 63 percent, believed the test to be either "extremely well-aligned" or "quite well-aligned" to the CCSS, with just six percent of the teachers

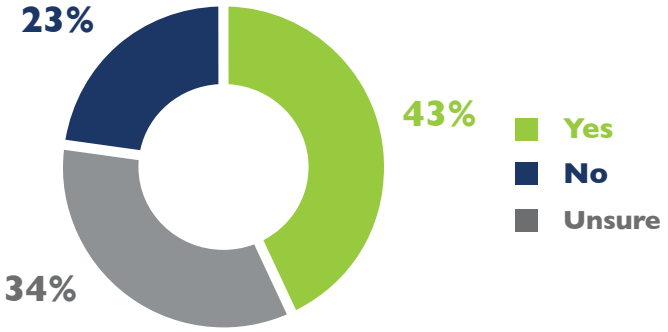
saying that the PARCC was either "slightly well-aligned" or "not at all well-aligned" to the standards (see Figure 2).[9]

Figure 2
Question: "Overall, how well-aligned is PARCC to the Common Core State Standards?" (n=743)



While educators viewed PARCC to be well-aligned to CCSS, did teachers also find that the PARCC tests were more aligned to their current classroom curriculum when compared to their prior state tests? The plurality of teachers, 43 percent, indicated that PARCC more accurately measured the content they taught in their classroom when compared to their previous state test. Twenty-three percent said it did not, while a third, 34 percent, were unsure (see Figure 3).[10]

Figure 3
Question: "Do PARCC sample questions more accurately measure the content you teach in your classroom as compared to your previous test?" (n=1000)



There are more teachers who think that PARCC is aligned to CCSS than those who think that it accurately measures what is taught in their classroom. One possible explanation is that there could be some teachers who are not yet fully teaching a CCSS-aligned curriculum. This could be due to curricular choices made by the district or state, lack of great materials, professional development, or time to implement a new curriculum.

The teachers who reviewed the PARCC sample items found the test to be well-aligned to the CCSS that their states have adopted. PARCC has addressed one of the qualities that teachers often cite as being important to them: a clear alignment between the tests they use and the standards and curriculum they teach in the classrooms.

FINDING #3: While the majority believe PARCC measures skills needed to be college and career ready, teachers were mixed on whether the test was grade-appropriate or too challenging.

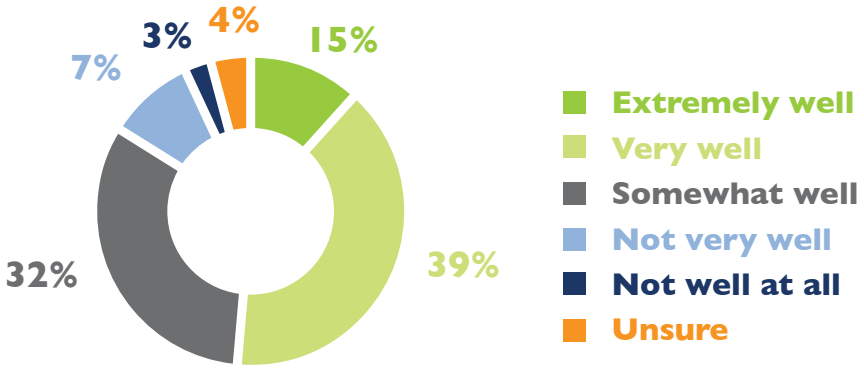
When we have previously asked teachers to rate assessments used in their classrooms, they were often critical of tests that lacked rigor, failed to address critical thinking skills, or lacked relevancy to students' success, such as the college and career readiness standards found in the CCSS. Next-generation assessments like PARCC were designed to address many of the issues that educators, parents, and administrators found problematic with the previous or existing state tests. The feedback of teachers who participated in this in-depth examination of PARCC sample questions suggests that they believe PARCC has developed a better summative assessment than what they previously administered, though not all issues raised by teachers were addressed.

One aspect of PARCC that teachers found particularly strong was the way it measured students' critical thinking skills. When asked about how well PARCC sample items do in measuring students' critical thinking skills, 69 percent of teachers said it did "extremely well" or "very well," as opposed to just five percent who responded "not very well" or "not at all well."[11]

69% of teachers believe that PARCC does extremely well or very well **in measuring critical thinking skills**

Specifically, the teachers believed that PARCC does a good job of measuring the skills that students need to be college- and career-ready, measuring students' critical thinking skills, requiring students to demonstrate their knowledge, and using an appropriate depth and variety of test questions. We found that a majority of teachers, 55 percent, said that the test did "extremely well" or "very well" in measuring college- and career-ready skills of students, with just nine percent of teachers responding "not very well" or "not well at all" (see Figure 4).[12]

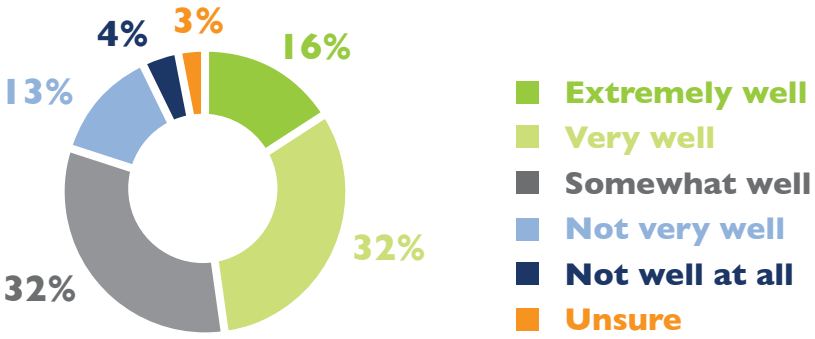
Figure 4
Question: "Based on your prior experiences and what you have seen today, how well does PARCC do in measuring skills that students need to have to be college and career ready?" (n=990)



In addition to the test's strength in measuring college and career readiness, teachers found that PARCC did a good job in requiring students to demonstrate knowledge. Sixty-six percent of teachers said that the test did "extremely well" or "very well" at demonstrating knowledge, while just six percent responded with "not very well" or "not well at all."[13] Finally, in addition to the content and critical thinking skills of the PARCC test, teachers found that the assessment did well in being appropriately rigorous for the grade level. We found that 48 percent of teachers responded "extremely well" or "very well" on PARCC being appropriately rigorous for the grade level while 17 percent said it was "not very well" or "not at all well" (see Figure 5).[14]

Figure 5

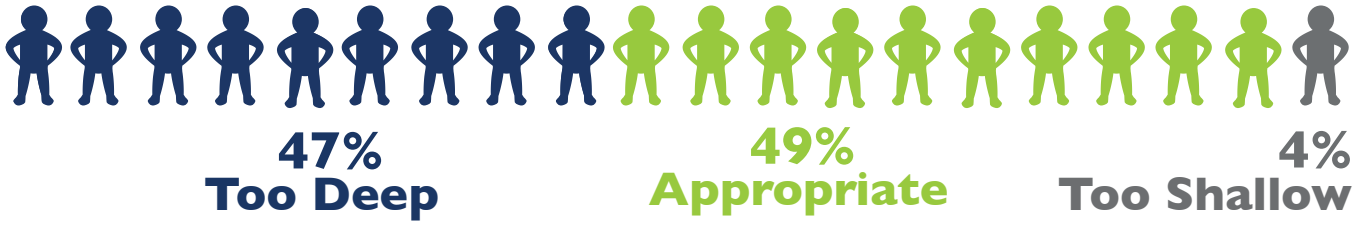
Question: "Based on your prior experiences and what you have seen today, how well does PARCC do in being appropriately rigorous for the grade level?" (n=991)



To learn more about what teachers thought about PARCC's rigor, we also asked whether teachers thought the test was assessing an appropriate depth of student knowledge when compared to the CCSS and whether a variety of questions were used. We found that a plurality of teachers, 49 percent, believed that the depth of student knowledge PARCC assessed with regard to Common Core was appropriate, though almost as many believed it was assessing too deep a depth of student knowledge (see Figure 6).[15]

Figure 6

Question: "First, is PARCC assessing the an appropriate depth of student knowledge as compared to the Common Core State Standards?" (n=736)



We also asked teachers about the variety of question types. While a majority of teachers, 56 percent, believed that the variety of question types was appropriate, 40 percent believed that the PARCC question types were too narrow with question types being too difficult. In addition, very few teachers said that the PARCC questions were too easy.[16] To better understand if this issue of difficulty was consistent across both subject areas, we examined the issue of rigor in teachers' specific feedback on ELA and math questions, which is discussed further in findings four and five.[17]

Another aspect of test difficulty that we explored concerned how teachers felt PARCC did in measuring the growth of students below or above grade level. In our previous work asking teachers to rate tests, one common trait of lower-rated tests was that some of them did not capture the growth of students below or above grade level.[18] We found that fewer than 20 percent of teachers who participated in "Testing the Test" events thought that it did well in this area while half the teachers, 49 percent, believed that PARCC did "not very well" or "not well at all" in capturing the growth of these students.[19] Coupled with the questions related to test difficulty described above, there seems to be evidence to suggest that many teachers feel that the PARCC test may not provide some students above or below grade level the opportunity to show what they know and can do in their classrooms.

One final related question about test difficulty was on the issue of test clarity. We asked teachers how well PARCC did in being clear about what was being asked. While 27 percent of teachers said it did "extremely well" or "very well" at being clear, 31 percent of teachers said it did "not very well" or "not at all well," with the plurality of teachers responding in the middle with "somewhat well."[20] As teachers gain familiarity with the CCSS and the related next-generation assessments, it is possible that these perspectives on test clarity and difficulty might change.

What Teachers Reviewed: PARCC Sample Items

Sample PARCC test items that teachers reviewed during "Testing the Test" events were representative of the overall test. Sample items can be accessed at http://parcc.pearson.com/practice-tests.

For ELA, sample items for each grade band group are from the Performance-Based Assessments Practice Tests:

- Elementary school grades: Grade 3 Questions 4, 5, 6, 7; Grade 4 Questions 8, 10, 12, 13, and 17
- Middle school grades: Grade 7 Questions 8, 9, 10, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, and 22
- High school grades: Grade 10 Questions 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, and 17

For math, sample items for each grade band group are from the End-of-Year Practice Tests:

- Elementary school grades: Grade 3 Questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7
- Middle school grades: Grade 8 Questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7
- High school grades: Algebra II Questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7

FINDING #4: Teachers find the English Language Arts (ELA) assessment strongly aligned to the key instructional shifts of the CCSS but may require knowledge students don't yet have.

Teachers focused on three major shifts in CCSS for English Language Arts

During the "Testing the Test" events, teachers who analyzed the ELA sample items focused on three major shifts in the CCSS to meet the demands of college and career readiness:

- The first shift focused on the use of "complex text." This describes work of publishable quality, which also demonstrates expertise in non-fiction. Included in this is the emphasis on finding the purpose and meaning of figurative language, such as metaphors or similes - a more authentic task than simply defining these terms.
- A second shift dealt with evidence and writing in response to texts; meaning that students base their responses on their close reading of the text instead of relying on prior knowledge.
- The third shift had to do with reading an increasing amount of complex, well-written non-fiction texts, without eliminating literature, as students progress through the grade levels.[21]

Data from written comments

The data for this and the following section on specific ELA and math questions are based on the written comments teachers gave in their rubric analyses.[22]

Nearly all participants found that the PARCC passages were better quality than the passages in state tests, as they are previously published pieces (indicating that they are complex and demonstrate expertise in nonfiction). However, there was some concern students did not have "background knowledge, nor the vocabulary to understand" vocabulary within the texts. Their comments suggest that to assess students as accurately as possible, some portions may need to be edited for diverse learners, or those with limited background knowledge of certain content areas.

Participants also were concerned about the greater focus on higher-order thinking when it comes to using the data to support all learners. They felt that an implication of this focus on higher-order thinking is that it may be harder to acquire actionable data for below level students, those with special needs, or English Language Learners. It is recommended that more support for teachers after the assessment is completed will be needed in order for them to effectively utilize the data for all students.

Range of questioning

Similarly, many participants said that text evidence was sufficient to answer some questions, but not all, resulting in some overall ratings of "partially meets" on their rubric. Many of the ratings confirmed that there is a "range" of questioning (in the level of difficulty), but there were some responses indicating that the focus is greater on more difficult questions. One participant stated that the questions related to one passage were "all higher on [Bloom's] taxonomy."

The rubric does not present an ideal weight of difficult versus simpler questions, but a gradual progression helps us to understand the level of difficulty that matches students' readiness or current levels of achievement. Without a gradual progression (if all questions are very ambitious), it may be harder to acquire actionable data for students below grade level, those with special needs, or English Language Learners.

Writing prompts

Teachers found that the writing prompts were sufficiently connected to texts and focused on central ideas and key details (rather than minutia). There were some remarks that certain vocabulary words did not have sufficient context clues to define using strategies alone, but again required prior knowledge of those words. The comment that some words were used "without the context to help" seemed to occur more in response to the text *Tinker vs. Des Moines Independent Community.*[23]

Based on the participants' comments, teachers would like to see the following:

- In order to assess students as accurately as possible, edit some portions for diverse learners, or for those with limited background knowledge of certain content areas.
- Provide more support for teachers after the assessment is completed in order for them to effectively utilize the data for all students.

In summary, teachers found the questions and passages to be high-quality, with an appropriate variety of question types, though some teachers' comments suggested that the questions were possibly too difficult. The theme of test difficulty could be reflective of the higher standards that teachers are now teaching in order to have their kids be college and career ready. For those teachers who teach students below grade level, the standards and associated assessments will be a significant, though worthwhile, transition.

FINDING #5: Teachers find the math questions cognitively demanding and balanced among concepts, procedures and application, though they wanted to see additional questions that increase the assessment rigor.

Common Core goals in math

The CCSS call for students to master mathematical application, procedural knowledge, and conceptual knowledge while focusing on the content that is most important for further success in math. The CCSS also call for higher-level thinking and utilization of math practices through a variety of task types to engage students in thinking about and using mathematics.[24] Given these characteristics, participants in the math analysis group were charged with evaluating sample assessment items from PARCC using the Council of Chief State School Officers Criteria for Procuring and Evaluating High-Quality Assessments for Mathematics.

Teachers looked at instructional and assessment shifts and analyzed by grade level

Teachers began with an overview of the instructional and assessment shifts (focus, coherence, and rigor) implied through the CCSS and kept these shifts in mind when analyzing the sample assessment items. The group was then divided so that teachers could analyze the items collaboratively by grade level bands (elementary, middle, and high school) to review the provided assessment sample items against the criteria rubric.

Data from written comments

As evidenced by their comments, most participants felt that the sample questions focused strongly on the "major content" needed for success in later mathematics and that they "strongly connect previous and upcoming grade level skills." Participants also appreciated the increased focus on this content in the assessment.

Most participants reported that there was an appropriate balance of concepts, procedures, and application, however they wanted to see even more application questions on the assessment. While some questions were adequately assessed procedurally, participants seemed to highly value application of content, which is consistent with the CCSS' call for more real-world application in mathematics instruction. Overall, participants were anticipating and still desiring more modeling and mathematical arguments in order to connect practice to content.[25]

Group observations

In observing the groups, the greatest discussion occurred over the cognitive demand of the sample questions. While most felt that the questions required "deep-level understanding of the concepts," many participants still felt a need for additional higher-order thinking questions. There was little evidence that anyone felt the questions were too cognitively demanding. The problems allow "for the realization of procedural and conceptual math, coupled with critical thinking practices."

Question rigor

There were suggestions calling for math practices to be integrated more frequently in order to increase the cognitive demand. Some also felt that there was a lack of attention to academic vocabulary. It was suggested many times that simply adding a "why" justification would be helpful in increasing the rigor of the question and the need for students to appropriately use the academic vocabulary which echoed the previous call for mathematical arguments. Lastly, participants felt there was a good variety of question types evident in the sample collection.[26]

Based on the participants' comments, teachers would like to see the following:

- More modeling and mathematical arguments in order to connect practice to content.
- More concept and application questions to help increase the rigor of the question.
- Add a "why" justification to help increase the rigor of the question.

In summary, teachers were highly positive about the PARCC assessment when reviewed through several different facets of the assessment, most importantly the focus and balance of concepts, procedures, and applications as well as the overall cognitive demand.

MOVING FORWARD: WHAT TEACHERS NEED

At "Testing the Test" events, teachers focused primarily on the quality of PARCC and not on the adequacy of technology or whether tests were being added to an already-crowded test landscape. In a series of questions about what supports teachers would find most useful in preparing their students for PARCC, we learned that teachers want more information and support regarding the actual PARCC test and want help in incorporating

formative assessments that are aligned to the summative PARCC test.

Additional sample questions

We find that teachers want access to better technology in their schools and time to collaborate with other teachers to prepare for the test. In a list of five types of resource supports, including time to collaborate with fellow teachers in preparation for the test, access to more/better technology than their school currently has, more sample questions, additional preparation materials, and material that would help them explain the shift to PARCC to families, the item that teachers said would be most useful was more sample questions, with 93 percent saying they would be "extremely useful" or "very useful." The choice of additional preparation materials was a close second with 92 percent of teachers indicating this would be "extremely useful" or "very useful."[27]

Professional development on PARCC

Similarly, when asked about the types of professional development they would find most useful, teachers said that professional development on the test and how to prepare their students for it was one of the top two most useful kinds of supports they could receive, with 86 percent of teachers saying it would be "extremely useful" or "very useful."[28]

86% of teachers say that professional development on PARCC and how to prepare their students for it **would be extremely or very useful**

Resources

Teachers are expressing strong interest for access to more materials and training to help them prepare their students for the test, which could encompass preparation for PARCC itself as well as resources to help their students meet and be knowledgeable on the new standards, i.e. CCSS, that PARCC is assessing. Learning more about the very specific types of professional development and resource teachers are finding they need from their schools, districts, and states could be an area for further research.

The ability to monitor student progress through formative assessments

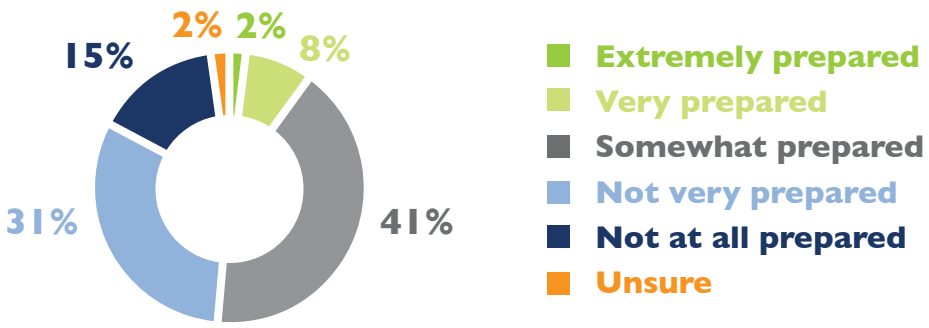
Teachers also seek help with next-generation formative assessments for use in their schools, with many of them asking for tests complementary to PARCC that they can use during the school year and for professional development in how to create similar assessments for their classrooms. Tests given during the school year, or formative assessments, can be used for a variety of purposes, including tracking student learning and guiding instructional practices.

When asked about useful professional development, how to create formative assessments that measure students' progress towards success on PARCC was rated highest, with 87 percent of teachers saying it would

be "extremely useful" or "very useful."[29]

It is likely that teachers are asking for help with formative assessments because many of them perceive that some teachers are not yet fully ready to create their own CCSS-aligned tests. When teachers were asked how prepared they felt the teachers in their school were to develop their own classroom-use formative assessments, just 11 percent said that they felt "extremely prepared" or "very prepared" to do so with more teachers feeling "not very prepared" or "not at all prepared" to develop their own assessments for classroom purposes (see Figure 7).[30]

Figure 7
Question: "How well prepared do you feel the teachers in your school are to develop their own classroom-use formative assessments aligned to the Common Core State Standards?" (n=962)



Furthermore, when asked if they would find formative assessments developed by PARCC useful, 53 percent of teachers said that this would be "extremely useful" or "very useful," and nine percent said that they would find it "not very useful" or "not at all useful."[31]

This high level of interest in developing and using next-generation type assessment questions year-round suggests a need that can be addressed at the school, district, and possibly state levels as well as by PARCC.

Access to better technology

Eighty-six percent of teachers said that access to more or better technology than what they currently had in schools would be "extremely useful" or "very useful."[32] In order for schools and teachers to make the best use of the technology and improvements in testing offered by a computer-based assessment like PARCC, teachers are indicating that the current state of their schools' technology might fall short and are therefore suggesting that further resources might be needed in this area. This suggestion was echoed during the "Testing the Test" large group discussions, where an oft-heard refrain from teachers was about their school's infrastructure and its ability to support student testing on computers.

Time to collaborate

Finally, we heard from teachers that they would find time to collaborate with fellow teachers in preparation for the test helpful. In the question about specific supports, 85 percent of teachers said that collaboration time would be "extremely useful" or "very useful."[33] Teachers highly value opportunities to collaborate and share best practices among fellow teachers.

Immediate next steps

Teachers' ideas on what they need and feel is lacking as they prepare for PARCC administration suggests a roadmap that points towards ways in which schools, districts, states, and assessment providers can target their efforts. Teachers' preferences for access to more support materials and formative assessments, as well as technology resources and opportunities to collaborate with colleagues, offer policymakers at all levels a set of immediate next steps and priorities on which to focus.

ENDNOTES

1. For more information about the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), please see http://parcc.pearson.com/.

2. Question: "Is this the first time you have seen PARCC sample questions?" (n = 1004) Responses: "Yes" (33.6 percent), "No" (66.4 percent); Question: "Did you and your class pilot the PARCC assessments last spring?" (n = 751) Responses: "Yes" (13.8 percent), "No" (86.2 percent). The second question was not used in the survey administered in Memphis or Nashville, TN. Results for each question may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

3. Council of Chief State School Officers. (2014). "Criteria for procuring and evaluating high-quality assessments." Washington, DC: Council of Chief State School Officers, retrieved from: http://www.ccsso.org/Documents/2014/CCSSO%20Criteria%20for%20High%20Quality%20Assessments%2003242014.pdf. For more information about Student Achievement Partners, please see http://achievethecore.org/about-us.

4. For PARCC sample questions, please see http://parcc.pearson.com/practice-tests/.

5. During the "Testing the Test" events, teachers were provided a paper survey at the end of the last session and given time to complete it. Some teachers left before the event concluded and did not fill out a survey, resulting in 1,014 surveys for this report. Additionally, while the surveys administered across sites contained many of the same questions, some questions were not used in Memphis and Nashville, Tennessee.

6. For more information about the DC-CAS, please see http://osse.dc.gov/service/dc-cas. For more information about the ISAT, please see http://www.isbe.net/assessment/isat.htm. For more information about the MCAS, please see http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/. For more information about the TCAP, please see http://www.tn.gov/education/assessment/grades_3-8.shtml.

7. Question: "How would you rate the quality of the previous state test to PARCC?" (n = 941) Responses: "PARCC is a higher quality assessment when compared to the previous state test." (78.5 percent), "PARCC is about the same as the previous state test." (16.7 percent), "PARCC is a lower quality assessment when compared to the previous state test." (4.8 percent). Surveys were tailored to each site's particular state test, e.g. in Massachusetts, the question read, "How would you rate the quality of MCAS to PARCC?" and the first survey response read, "PARCC is a higher quality assessment when compared to MCAS."

8. In winter 2012, Teach Plus launched an online tool called "Assessment Advisor" where teachers could rate the tests they used in their schools, including tests administered by their states.

9. Question: "Overall, how well-aligned is PARCC to the Common Core State Standards?" (n = 743)

Responses: “Extremely well-aligned” (7.0 percent), “Quite well-aligned” (56.4 percent), “Somewhat well-aligned” (30.7 percent), “Slightly well-aligned” (5.0 percent), “Not at all well-aligned” (0.9 percent). This question was not used in the survey administered in Memphis or Nashville, TN. Aggregated summary responses may not add to 100% due to rounding.

10. Question: “Do PARCC sample questions more accurately measure the content you teach in your classroom as compared to the previous state test?” (n = 1000) “Yes” (43.1 percent),”No” (23.4 percent), “Unsure” (33.5 percent). This question was also tailored to each site’s state test, e.g. in Massachusetts, the question read, “Do PARCC sample questions more accurately measure the content you teach in your classroom as compared to MCAS?” Results without Tennessee data are as follows: Question: “Do PARCC sample questions more accurately measure the content you teach in your classroom as compared to the previous state test?” (n = 747) “Yes” (44.7 percent), ”No” (19.8 percent), “Unsure” (35.5 percent).

11. Question: “Based on your prior experiences and what you have seen today, how well does PARCC do in measuring critical thinking skills?” (n = 997) “Extremely well” (26.1 percent), “Very well” (42.7 percent), “Somewhat well” (25.1 percent), ”Not very well” (4.2 percent), “Not well at all” (1.1 percent), “Unsure” (0.8 percent).

12. Question: “Based on your prior experiences and what you have seen today, how well does PARCC do in measuring skills that students must have in order to be college and career ready?” (n = 990) Responses: “Extremely well” (15.4 percent), “Very well” (39.4 percent), “Somewhat well” (32.1 percent), “Not very well” (6.7 percent), “Not well at all” (2.7 percent), “Unsure” (3.7 percent).

13. Question: “Based on your prior experiences and what you have seen today, how well does PARCC do in requiring students to demonstrate knowledge?” (n = 996) Responses: “Extremely well” (19.4 percent), “Very well” (46.9 percent), “Somewhat well” (27.1 percent), “Not very well” (4.7 percent), “Not well at all” (1.6 percent), “Unsure” (0.3 percent).

14. Question: “Based on your prior experiences and what you have seen today, how well does PARCC do in being appropriately rigorous for the grade level?” (n = 991) Responses: “Extremely well” (16.2 percent), “Very well” (31.8 percent), “Somewhat well” (31.6 percent), “Not very well” (13.1 percent), “Not well at all” (4.1 percent), “Unsure” (3.1 percent).

15. Question: “First, is PARCC assessing an appropriate depth of student knowledge as compared to the Common Core State Standards?” (n = 736) “PARCC is assessing too deep a depth of student knowledge” (47.3 percent) “PARCC is assessing an appropriate level of student knowledge” (48.5 percent), “PARCC is assessing too shallow a depth of student knowledge” (4.2 percent). This question was not used in the survey administered in Memphis or Nashville, TN.

16. Question: “Second, does PARCC assess student knowledge using an appropriate variety of question types?” (n = 713) Responses: “PARCC question variety is too narrow, the question types are too difficult” (39.6 percent), “PARCC question variety is appropriate” (56.4 percent), “PARCC question variety is too narrow, the question types are too easy” (4.1 percent). This question was not used in the survey

administered in Memphis or Nashville, TN.

17. Findings 4 and 5 draw on teachers' comments and responses that they provided on the rubric used to evaluate sample PARCC questions.

18. See endnote 8.

19. Question: "Based on your prior experiences and what you have seen today, how well does PARCC do in measuring the learning growth of students who are below or above grade level?" (n = 990) Responses: "Extremely well" (4.3 percent), "Very well" (13.4 percent), "Somewhat well" (20.3 percent), "Not very well" (29.8 percent), "Not well at all" (19.6 percent), "Unsure" (12.5 percent).

20. Question: "Based on your prior experiences and what you have seen today, how well does PARCC do in being clear about what is being asked?" (n = 995) Responses: "Extremely well" (6.1 percent), "Very well" (20.8 percent), "Somewhat well" (40.7 percent), "Not very well" (22.2 percent), "Not well at all" (8.9 percent), "Unsure" (1.2 percent).

21. For more information about the literacy shifts, please see http://achievethecore.org/page/970/before-and-after-the-literacy-shifts-in-common-core-aligned-assessment-detail-pg.

22. For more information about CCSSO and SAP resource materials, please see endnote 3. Materials used for "Testing the Test" events were modified by teachers led by Teach Plus Teaching Policy Fellows.

23. Data used for this finding were collected from written responses teachers made in the rubrics and submitted at the conclusion of the "Testing the Test" events.

24. For more information about the math shifts, please see http://achievethecore.org/page/1019/before-and-after-the-math-shifts-in-common-core-aligned-assessments-detail-pg.

25. For more information about CCSSO and SAP resource materials, please see endnote 3. Materials used for "Testing the Test" events were modified by teachers led by Teach Plus Teaching Policy Fellows.

26. Data used for this finding were collected from written responses teachers made in the rubrics and submitted at the conclusion of the "Testing the Test" events.

27. Question: "How useful would more sample questions be in helping prepare your students to take PARCC?" (n = 973) Responses: "Extremely useful" (73.0 percent), "Very useful" (20.0 percent), "Somewhat useful" (5.2 percent), "Not very useful" (1.0 percent), "Not at all useful" (0.1 percent), "Unsure" (0.6 percent). Question: "How useful would additional preparation materials be in helping prepare your students to take PARCC?" (n = 969) Responses: "Extremely useful" (70.3 percent), "Very useful" (22.0 percent), "Somewhat useful" (5.2 percent), "Not very useful" (0.8 percent), "Not at all useful" (0.4

percent), “Unsure” (1.3 percent).

28. Question: “How useful would professional development on the test and how to prepare your students for it be to you as you help your students prepare for PARCC?” (n=980) Responses: “Extremely useful” (58.2 percent), “Very useful” (28.2 percent), “Somewhat useful” (10.4 percent), “Not very useful” (1.3 percent), “Not at all useful” (1.1 percent), “Unsure” (0.8 percent).

29. Question: “How useful would professional development on how to create formative assessments that measure students’ progress towards success on PARCC be to you as you help your students prepare for PARCC?” (n = 978) Responses: “Extremely useful” (57.3 percent), “Very useful” (29.4 percent), “Somewhat useful” (10.0 percent), “Not very useful” (1.8 percent), “Not at all useful” (0.7 percent), “Unsure” (0.7 percent).

30. Question: “How well-prepared do you feel the teachers in your school are to develop their own, classroom-use formative assessments aligned to the Common Core State Standards?” (n = 962) Responses: “Extremely prepared” (2.3 percent), “Very prepared” (8.3 percent), “Somewhat prepared” (41.2 percent), “Not very prepared” (31.1 percent), “Not at all prepared” (15.4 percent), “Unsure” (1.7 percent).

31. Question: “Based on your experience with PARCC sample summative assessment items, how useful would you find other PARCC assessments for diagnostic and formative purposes?” (n = 994) Responses: “Extremely useful” (16.7 percent), “Very useful” (36.4 percent) “Somewhat useful” (33.1 percent), “Not very useful” (6.3 percent), “Not at all useful” (2.5 percent), “Unsure” (4.9 percent).

32. Question: “How useful would access to more/better technology than my school currently has be in helping prepare your students to take PARCC?” (n = 977) Responses: “Extremely useful” (64.4 percent), “Very useful” (22.0 percent), “Somewhat useful” (9.7 percent), “Not very useful” (1.1 percent), “Not at all useful” (0.9 percent), “Unsure” (1.8 percent).

33. Question: “How useful would time to collaborate with fellow teachers in preparation for the test be in helping prepare your students to take PARCC?” (n = 980) Responses: “Extremely useful” (53.9 percent), “Very useful” (30.9 percent), “Somewhat useful” (12.0 percent), “Not very useful” (2.0 percent), “Not at all useful” (0.4 percent), “Unsure” (0.7 percent).