



## PARCC COLLEGE- AND CAREER-READY DETERMINATION POLICY IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS/LITERACY AND MATHEMATICS & POLICY-LEVEL PERFORMANCE LEVEL DESCRIPTORS

### *Frequently Asked Questions*

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#### **Purpose and Background**

##### ***What is the purpose of PARCC's College- and Career-Ready Determination (CCRD) Policy?***

This policy describes the academic knowledge, skills, and practices in English language arts/literacy and mathematics students must demonstrate to be academically prepared for success in college and careers. This will provide policymakers, educators, parents, and students with a clear signal about the level of academic preparation needed for success after high school. Public two- and four-year colleges and universities in PARCC states are working with PARCC to ensure they can accept the CCRD benchmark as a valid indicator of students' preparation for entry-level English and mathematics courses that lead to a degree or credential. Students who attain a CCRD in English language arts/literacy and/or mathematics will have a tangible benefit – direct entry into relevant entry-level, credit-bearing courses without need for remedial coursework and exemption from taking a placement test in that subject at their college or university.

##### ***What is the purpose of PARCC's Policy-Level Performance Level Descriptors (PLDs) and General Content Claims?***

The policy-level PLDs and general content claims describe, in broad terms, the knowledge, skills, and practices students performing at a given performance level are able to demonstrate. They also indicate, for specific performance levels, whether students might need additional support or are likely to be ready for the next grade-level without additional support.

The policy-level PLDs and general content claims will be used by PARCC to guide the development of items and tasks and will lay a foundation for setting performance levels for the PARCC assessments. They will also communicate to K-12 and postsecondary educators, parents, and students about PARCC's level of expectations and how student mastery of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) will be evaluated through PARCC.

### ***How were the Performance Level Descriptors (PLDs) and the College- and Career-Ready Determination (CCRD) policy created?***

Development of PLDs is an important step in the development of large-scale assessments. PARCC state K-12 and higher education leaders consulted exemplars of policy-level descriptors from current state standardized assessments and those used for the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) as well as the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) through an iterative process to draft, review, and refine the descriptors over several months in the spring of 2012. The draft was reviewed and refined with input from state leaders and content experts.

On July 12, 2012, the PARCC Governing Board and the Governing State representatives of the Advisory Committee on College Readiness (ACCR) approved draft PLDs and a draft CCRD policy for public comment; after reviewing the initial round of public comments, PARCC decided to open a second comment period in September 2012 to get specific feedback on issues related to career readiness. Nearly 800 individuals provided comments on the PLDs and CCRD policy, and their comments were carefully reviewed by PARCC to inform subsequent revisions to the document. On October 25, 2012, the Governing Board and Governing State representatives of ACCR voted unanimously to adopt the PLDs and CCRD policy.

### **Performance Levels**

#### ***Why were five performance levels chosen?***

After consultation with stakeholders, PARCC adopted five performance levels for reporting results on the assessments for a number of reasons:

- PARCC assessments will include a sufficient number of score points to support the accurate classification of student performance into five levels;
- Five levels will help provide better information across the full range of student performance, particularly for low-performing and high-performing students;
- Five levels will help schools better target assistance to students;
- Five levels will provide states with options for using performance levels with greater precision in various accountability mechanisms and decisions; and
- Five levels will provide increased opportunities for students, schools and districts to demonstrate growth.

Students who perform at Level 4 will have earned the College- and Career-Ready Determination.

#### ***Why are the performance levels numbered instead of named?***

At this time, PARCC has not chosen names for the performance levels. Public and state feedback suggested that numbering the performance levels (rather than naming them) would help focus stakeholders on the knowledge, skills and practices associated with a particular level rather than on a label. Additional feedback received indicated that performance level names could be redundant and that it was best to keep the policy as simple as possible. This decision does not preclude PARCC from adopting performance level names in the future.

### **College- and Career-Ready Determination**

#### ***How long will the College- and Career-Ready Determination be valid?***

At this time, PARCC does not plan to set a standard policy for the length of time the CCRD will be valid. When using the PARCC College- and Career-Ready Determinations to place students into entry-level, credit-bearing courses, higher education systems or institutions may impose additional conditions, such as time limits, a requirement of continuous enrollment through graduation from high school in courses offered through dual/concurrent enrollment, or higher-level high school courses. This will be a decision made by states or postsecondary systems/institutions.

***Will the College- and Career-Ready Determinations apply the same to two-year and four-year higher education institutions?***

Yes. The College- and Career-Ready Determinations (CCRDs) are designed to apply to both two-year and four-year higher education institutions. As PARCC assessments are developed and implemented in 2014-2015, systems and institutions of higher education will determine whether to accept the CCRDs to directly place students into relevant entry-level, credit-bearing courses without the need for remedial coursework.

***Can students use the College- and Career-Ready Determination for placement at private postsecondary institutions?***

Yes. Although the PARCC College- and Career-Ready Determinations (CCRDs) will be validated through studies based on students attending public institutions of higher education, private institutions of higher education could certainly use the data or CCRDs produced by the PARCC assessments for placement of students into first-year, credit-bearing courses. For more information see, the section of the policy titled “Determining and Validating College- and Career-Ready Threshold Scores.”

***How will PARCC address non-academic college- and career-ready skills?***

The PARCC College- and Career-Ready Determinations in English language arts/literacy and mathematics are focused on describing the extent to which students have mastered the academic knowledge, skills and practices necessary for success in postsecondary programs and high-skilled careers and will *not* address other critical elements of college and career readiness. PARCC acknowledges that academic preparation does not encompass the full range of knowledge and skills students need to be ready for college and careers, such as those described by Conley (2012)<sup>1</sup> which include persistence, motivation, time management, and awareness of postsecondary norms and culture; by the Association of Career Technical Education (2010)<sup>2</sup> which include employability and technical skills in addition to academic skills; and the Career Readiness Partner Council (2012)<sup>3</sup> which include academic, technical, and employability knowledge, skills and dispositions. While many of the skills critical in careers – such as problem solving, critical thinking, reasoning, and effective written communications – will be assessed through PARCC, a comprehensive determination of college and career readiness that would include these additional factors is simply beyond the scope of the PARCC assessments in English language arts/literacy and mathematics at this time.

***What happens to students who do not score at the college- and career-ready level by the end of their senior year?***

Students who do not earn a College- and Career-Ready Determination and enroll in postsecondary institutions will not be exempt from taking placement tests that help determine whether they are academically prepared for credit-bearing - rather than remedial - courses. Having information about their readiness throughout high school will allow these students to work with their teachers, parents, and school to determine what additional coursework or extra support they might need to become academically ready for those courses.

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<sup>1</sup> David T. Conley (2012). “A Complete Definition of College and Career Readiness.” The Educational Policy Improvement Center. <https://www.epiconline.org/readiness/definition.dot>

<sup>2</sup> ACTE (2010). “What is Career-Ready?” Association of Career and Technical Education. <https://www.acteonline.org/readiness.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> The Career Readiness Partner Council (2010). “Building Blocks for Change: What it Means to be Career Ready.” [http://careerreadynow.org/docs/CRPC\\_4pagerB.pdf](http://careerreadynow.org/docs/CRPC_4pagerB.pdf)

***How will this policy impact high school graduation requirements?***

While PARCC states have agreed to set a common benchmark for the College- and Career-Ready Determination, states will determine whether and how to include the PARCC assessments in their criteria for high school graduation.

***Will the English language arts/literacy assessments report only one score, or will there be a separate score reported for reading and writing? Will both scores count for toward the English language arts/literacy College- and Career-Ready Determination?***

A separate score will be reported for reading and for writing. Both the reading and writing scores will contribute to a student’s overall PARCC English language arts/literacy score.

***Can students use the College- and Career-Ready Determination for entry into apprenticeships or other privately-provided technical training?***

Yes, although the data to validate the assessments for this purpose is not available across all states so institutions will have to build their own validity evidence.

**Research and Validation of College- and Career-Ready Determination**

***What is a validation statement?***

A validation statement defines the target at which PARCC will set the College- and Career-Ready Determination (CCRD) so that PARCC can study student outcomes and set the standard at the appropriate level.

The statement serves two major purposes: 1) to guide future research into the success of students who attain a CCRD in entry-level, credit-bearing courses, and 2) to provide additional data to the process of setting performance levels on the PARCC assessments in 2014-15. The validation research studies conducted after the administration of the PARCC assessments in 2014-15 will examine students’ course grades in entry-level, credit-bearing courses and compare those to students’ scores on the PARCC assessments. The studies will seek to determine the scores on the PARCC assessments that indicate that students have a high likelihood of future success in such courses. The validation statement provides precise definitions of “high likelihood” and “success” within these studies.

***What does it mean to set validation criteria at “0.75 probability of earning a C”?***

The validation criteria are set to ensure that the level of performance on the PARCC high school assessments associated with earning the College- and Career-Ready Determination (CCRD) reflects a high likelihood of student success in entry-level, credit-bearing courses in ELA/literacy or mathematics. Defining “high likelihood” as a 0.75 probability and “success” as a grade of “C” gives direction to future PARCC research studies that will be designed to validate the level of performance corresponding to the CCRDs. It also gives additional direction to those who will be involved in PARCC standard-setting (establishing cut scores for each performance level) in 2014-15.

***How does the validation statement relate to the policy?***

The validation statement is included in the College- and Career-Ready Determination (CCRD) policy to communicate PARCC’s definition of a high likelihood of success in entry-level, credit-bearing courses. This will make the CCRD policy more transparent to institutions of higher education as they make plans to use the CCRDs for placement decisions, and to educators, parents, and students focused on what it means to earn the CCRDs.

***Why was “C” chosen as a validation criterion?***

At nearly all postsecondary institutions, a “C” is the minimum grade needed to earn credit for a course, thus the validation criteria align with the expectations for course and degree completion at many higher education

institutions/systems in PARCC states. Over time, PARCC will conduct research to determine the likelihood of students earning other grades in those courses (e.g. an “A” or a “B”), and how that corresponds to the CCRD score.

***Why was 0.75 probability chosen as the validation metric?***

After much discussion among PARCC state leaders and through consultation with stakeholders and the public, the 0.75 probability was chosen because it is a reasonably high standard but not so high that using it would create a College- and Career-Ready score that is unattainable. It is also similar to the criteria used by ACT, thus there is some research/evidence on a similar criterion. Lastly, a 0.75 probability recognizes that academic preparation is an essential factor for success in entry-level, credit-bearing courses, but other factors beyond academic preparation – such as students’ persistence, finances, health, and other factors – also contribute to their ultimate success in these courses.

***To what group of students does the 0.75 probability of a C or better pertain?***

Students who graduate from high school and directly matriculate into college entry-level, credit-bearing courses.

**Target Entry-Level Postsecondary Courses for English Language Arts/Literacy and Mathematics**

***Why College English Composition, Literature and technical courses requiring college-level reading and writing included in the definition of entry-level credit-bearing postsecondary English language arts/literacy courses?***

The courses associated with the English language arts/literacy College- and Career-Ready Determination (CCRD) includes College English Composition, Literature, and technical courses requiring college-level reading and writing. These are the highest priority courses against which PARCC plans to validate the CCRD in the near term, as these are the courses for which English placement tests are most frequently used to determine student placement. Additionally, many colleges and universities do not currently use English placement tests to place students into courses outside English literature and composition. In the long term, PARCC may validate the CCRD for use in placing students into non-technical courses that require college-level reading and writing, such as introductory courses in history and social sciences.

***Why were College Algebra, Introductory Statistics and technical courses that require an equivalent level of mathematics included in the definition of entry-level credit-bearing postsecondary mathematics courses?***

The Common Core State Standards were back-mapped from the expectations of rigorous college algebra and introductory statistics courses. While some feedback from states and the public was received suggesting to remove College Introductory Statistics from the definition of mathematics courses to be validated in the College- and Career-Ready Determination (CCRD), the vast majority of feedback was supportive of including statistics in the definition of entry-level, credit-bearing postsecondary mathematics courses.

PARCC will validate the CCRD in mathematics against these courses. After full test administration, PARCC may conduct research to determine whether the CCRD in mathematics can be validated for use in other mathematics courses. Although the PARCC CCRD in mathematics applies to these courses given their prevalent role as entry-level credit-bearing courses, this does not preclude institutions of higher education from using the data or the CCRDs produced by the PARCC assessments for placement of students into other entry-level, credit-bearing mathematics courses such as Quantitative Literacy/Mathematics for Liberal Arts.

**General Content Claims of the Policy-Level Performance Level Descriptors**

***How was the language for the content claims derived?***

The language for the content claims was derived from the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and supporting documents, such as the [PARCC Model Content Frameworks](#). Some state and public feedback suggested specific

wording changes to the general content claims in the Performance Level Descriptors that would provide greater clarity. PARCC considered numerous suggestions from the feedback and in some instances applied some changes to enhance clarity. In other areas of the content claims, PARCC retained the language to maintain consistency with the CCSS and other PARCC documents.

***When will PARCC break the content claims into various grade levels?***

Subject- and grade-specific Performance Level Descriptors are being developed by K-12 and postsecondary content experts from PARCC states and will be released for public comment in spring 2013.

**Next Steps**

***What are PARCC's next steps with the Performance Level Descriptors (PLDs) and the College- and Career-Ready Determination (CCRD) Policy?***

On October 25, 2012, the Governing Board and Governing State representatives of ACCR voted unanimously to adopt the PLDs and CCRD policy. PARCC publicly released the approved policies in early November 2012.

PARCC state content experts and postsecondary faculty are currently working to develop subject- and grade-specific PLDs. The PARCC Governing Board and Advisory Committee on College Readiness will review them and vote to release them for public comment in spring 2013.