

THE PARCC ASSESSMENT IN MARYLAND

Alternatives to a Failing National Test

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Executive Summary

Every state administers standardized tests to identify gaps in learning and to determine where students are in their educational process. The recently implemented Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessments, however, have provided more costs than benefits in pursuit of this goal.

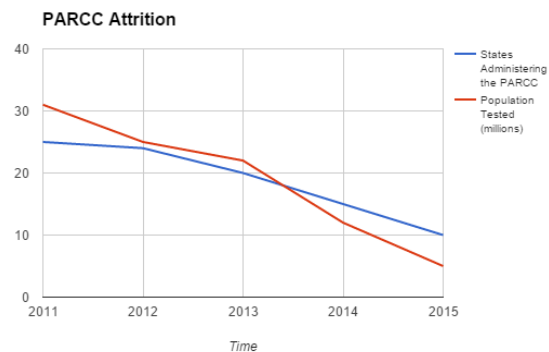
During its first year in Maryland schools, the PARCC exam has experienced several difficulties which have countered the benefits of administering the assessment including inefficient use of time, low construct validity, and technological problems. The test also fails to provide incentives to teachers, students, and administrators, as there are no consequences for poor performance. These problems reflect weaknesses in both the test itself and its implementation. In addition, recent attrition¹ among PARCC members makes it difficult to identify the test as a national standard, despite that being the exam's original purpose.

Students, teachers, and parents all expect standardized testing to provide a clear measure of a student's progress in achieving Common Core learning standards, just as the Maryland

Department of Education utilizes aggregate scores to evaluate its own performance. When the test fails to adequately evaluate students, as the PARCC has, these stakeholders are left with no clear benefit for the hours of instruction and millions of dollars spent on the exams.

The following changes are necessary to improving the effectiveness of the PARCC assessment: use of multiple readability measures, allowing proctors to shorten testing periods, removing some writing passages, providing pencil and paper exams, and supplying separate testing environments for students with special accommodations. There are several methods to achieve these reforms, which range from introducing changes within the PARCC consortium to abandoning it entirely.

If Maryland chooses to remain a member of the PARCC consortium, some limited changes may be possible through the Secretary of the Maryland Higher Education Commission, Jennie C. Hunter-Cevera, who sits on the Advisory Committee on College Readiness. However, in order to guarantee reform, the state would have to remove itself from the organization and either adopt a third-party test or create its own. We believe that the best option is for Maryland to leave the PARCC consortium and purchase a third-party exam such as the ACT Aspire. This new exam should be implemented as a requirement for high school graduation. This option allows the state control over the content, structure, and administration of the test while remaining aligned with Common Core standards. It also increases student and teacher accountability and maintains



Maryland’s eligibility for federal funding while providing a reliable test to Maryland students in a timely manner.

I. Standardized Testing: Its History, Development and Purpose

Since standardized testing first appeared in China in 518 C.E., its goal has remained unchanged: to determine if an individual is prepared for the future.² In the United States, different periods of history have brought about different methods of reaching this goal, the most notable period being the 1960s during which the Lyndon B. Johnson Administration, as part of the War on Poverty, passed The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1965.³ The ESEA was created specifically to close achievement gaps between children of different socioeconomic groups in reading, math and writing. It also created Title I funding and is known as the first piece of legislation to significantly affect education⁴. During this time period, standardized testing became a way to enforce teacher accountability as well as a means for measuring student preparedness for their next level of education. As Alice Rivlin, the Assistant Secretary of the American Society for Public Administration put it in 1971, “the important goals of education are both easily identified and can be measured [through standardized testing].”⁵

In the 1980s Ronald Reagan’s National Commission on Excellence in Education released a report titled “A Nation At Risk” which outlined a series of reforms the Commission suggested be made to the US educational system.⁶ These reforms stemmed from a fear that American schools were falling behind global standards. This report influenced the Improving America’s Schools Act (NASI), which passed in 1994 and created federal standards in reading, math and writing. This act also encouraged states to administer standardized tests before students changed from one level of schooling to the next.⁷ As changes were being made and new standards were being established states adopted an increasingly demanding standardized testing system.

Major reforms occurred in 2001 with the enactment of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Increasingly “challenging” standards and a greater emphasis on standardized testing came with this new amendment to the ESEA. States were required to note their Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), new qualifications were established for teachers, and a National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) was created to provide national comparison between all 4th and all 8th graders in the country.⁸ Standardized testing has become a core part of education, and as its prevalence has grown so has pushback against it.

After speaking with teachers from Anne Arundel and Howard County high schools, it became clear that teachers, parents and students have become frustrated with these tests for many reasons. Teachers and parents argue that standardized testing takes away vital learning time from the classroom. The idea that standardized testing can be used to measure teacher performance has often encouraged teachers to focus more on criteria covered in exams rather than other essential pieces of information that students should be learning in school. After interviewing high school students from Howard County, we found that students are often petrified by these exams, as they fear that failing these exams will have detrimental effects on their school placement and career in general. In fact, parents argue that these tests lead to student anxiety and have frequently shutdown student's willingness to learn, especially because students are increasingly being over-tested.

Altogether, feedback on testing has become increasingly negative in the past decade. This most often is because students are being over-tested and are subject to multiple high stake exams. However, testing does have its benefits. It gives us an idea of where students stand in their educational process; it marks progress and it shows where gaps in learning are. A healthy balance is needed in this system. We believe that the state of Maryland can solve many standardized testing problems by instituting an appropriate exam that succeeds in holding students accountable (to give them incentive to try on exams), but measures each child's knowledge in a time-respective manner. The standardized test currently in use in Maryland, the PARCC, fails to achieve this balance. In more than one respect the PARCC is not a functional measurement tool. Maryland needs to adopt a test that can better measure our student's college and career readiness in a more efficient way.

II. A Brief Overview of the PARCC Assessment

The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) exams were created in order to align states with Common Core, an initiative initially adopted by 26 states and the District of Columbia to homogenize and improve the standards our educators utilize in the classroom and the criteria for student evaluation.⁹ The goal of Common Core has been to study and adopt the most effective and efficient methods of teaching, in an effort to make the students of our nation college and career ready. Best practices established by the Common

Core Initiative have been founded on the examination of effective educational systems around the world and collaboration with teachers and administrators within our nation.¹⁰

The idea of a homogenized national standard has led to the development of a branch-off initiative to create standardized tests which will measure students' progress in mastering the Common Core standards. The intention was to create a test that could measure and encourage the use of greater "depths of knowledge" (DOK). The term "depth of knowledge" has been segmented into four levels of thinking, as follows: DOK1: requires basic comprehension, DOK2: requires greater mental processing but with the use of conceptual information, DOK3: "requires abstract thinking...and complex inferences," and DOK4: "non-routine application" that "requires analysis across context."¹¹ According to a study done by the National Center for Research and Evaluation (NCRE) this exam has successfully "increased the intellectual rigor relative to current state assessments." However, it is important to note here that this comparison was made by aggregating all current state assessments results together, rather than comparing the PARCC exams to those of each state individually. It is also important to note that extensive research done by the NCRE also found that the "performance tasks" and implementation standards of the PARCC exams are "danger points" to the effectiveness of this exam, meaning that the well-intentioned assessment may become costly and ineffective.¹² Multiple states which chose to implement these exams in the 2014-15 school year are now reviewing their decision to do so as leaders, administrators, and teachers are starting to fear that the cost of these exams outweigh the benefits.

III. Problems Arise

All students in grades 3-11 in Maryland schools took these tests during the 2014-15 school year, but students, teachers, and parents are all uncertain as to why they wasted the time. The goals of the PARCC, while admirable, have not been achieved because of the questionable quality of the tests, technical challenges in administration, limited adoption nationwide, and the excessive resources which must be dedicated to the administration of the PARCC assessment.

With the PARCC's rollout this school year, teachers and students saw multiple issues arise. Computers and software crashed, causing students to retake portions of the test multiple times; Teachers were frustrated by the amount of time necessary to prepare for the PARCC, and the

necessity of another new curriculum; and because the test has no bearing on grading or graduation, students felt no motivation to put in their best efforts or to participate at all, as shown by the “Opt-Out” movement in other PARCC states such as New York.¹³

Although steps have been taken to decrease the amount of time spent in testing, teachers estimate that an average student will still lose over six weeks of instruction because of testing and test preparation.¹⁴ According to an Anne Arundel County Teacher, teachers are typically unable to access computers for instructional purposes during the testing window, which significantly reduces the resources available for end-of-year projects such as research papers. During administration of the PARCC exams, proctors experienced frustration with the requirement that the full allotment of time be given for each section of the test despite all of the students in the room having finished prior to the end of the session, as it caused students to lose instruction time unnecessarily.

We have contacted teachers in various counties in Maryland, all of whom agree that the Common Core standards are reasonable, and not noticeably more or less rigorous than the previous Maryland standards. However, in each case, the PARCC was identified as an excessive burden on teachers’ time and schools’ resources. The test is available in pencil-and-paper format for a limited time, but is largely administered electronically and will soon be offered exclusively online, with rare exceptions (special education students), in order to save costs¹⁵ over current testing methods.¹⁶ According to a Spokesman from the Maryland Department of Education “Maryland had less problems than any other state with giving this test electronically.”¹⁷ Opponents of the PARCC argue that administering an online test is burdensome for schools; Broadneck High School in Anne Arundel County, for example, invested in two sets of Google Chromebooks in order to expedite the PARCC testing, but despite this the school’s teachers remained unable to use computer labs for instructional purposes during the testing window. Additionally, many interviewed students noted that they had recurring problems with their exams, and that these problems did in fact impede their ability to perform their best as they were being tested. In fact, one student interviewed said they were kicked out of their exam seven times during the testing period. This student was not alone in having to worry about accessing their test, rather than concentrating on the material being tested. Other students experienced difficulties with unexpected scrolling and highlighting of text, written responses being deleted, and having to wait in silence for extended periods of time for testing software to function.¹⁸

Technological problems are particularly a concern in lower income schools in Baltimore City and other parts of Maryland, as the quantity and quality of computers available make it difficult to ensure that every student takes the test during the testing window. Further, students in lower income schools face technical challenges during testing. These challenges are less frequently experienced by students in schools with more modern computers and technical infrastructure, which compounds the performance gap already identified between schools in high and low income communities. Further equity concerns have been raised regarding the increased difficulty of the test for students who are learning English as their non-primary language.

The PARCC exam tests reading, writing, and mathematics at all grade levels. It is expected that the test accurately assess a student's ability to read at their grade level, but ultimately it fails to do so. During the PARCC's creation, only one measure of readability was used to determine appropriate readings for each grade level. However, use of multiple readability measures during Analysis of sample passages indicates that students are tested using passages which are, on average, appropriate for students two grade levels above them.¹⁹

Maryland is one of 8 members of the PARCC governing board, which includes 7 states and the District of Columbia. 12 members fully administered the PARCC exam during the 2014-15 school year, while other states and jurisdictions have chosen to pilot the tests in select schools or populations. Ohio and Arkansas were governing members during the 2014-15 school year, but Ohio stopped funding the PARCC exam on June 30, 2015, citing complaints about technological glitches and time use, and Arkansas similarly abandoned the PARCC exam in July 2015, following a decision by the State Board of Education.²⁰ In combination with the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC), which has 16 governing members including 15 states and the U.S. Virgin Islands, Common Core assessments are currently the fully implemented norm in 23 states, D.C., and the Virgin Islands. In addition, the SBAC test has been accepted as a part of the selection process for 197 colleges and universities as of April 2015.²¹ However, in order for the common core test scores to become nationally transferable as they are meant to be, there must be a single test which is accepted by a clear majority of states, in the same way that the SAT is considered a national benchmark by institutions of higher education. This cohesion does not exist as of yet, a situation which has in part been caused by the federal government's choice to provide financial support to both PARCC and SBAC, which limits the effectiveness of both the SBAC and the PARCC.

The PARCC has been further set back by an astonishingly high attrition rate. In 2011, the PARCC consortium included 17 states and Washington D.C. as Governing States, as well as 7 participating but non-governing states.²² During the 2014-15 school year, only 11 states and D.C. remained as Governing States, and New York, which has since entirely ended its relationship with Pearson and the PARCC, was the only non-governing state to administer the test (to 5,000 of its over 1 million students), reflecting an attrition rate of nearly 50%. This vote of no confidence from the states, accompanied by harsh criticism from teachers unions, school superintendents, teachers, and principals, has damaged the PARCC tests' credibility to a point where it may no longer be able to function as a statewide, much less national, standard.^{23, 24, 25}

The response in classrooms to the PARCC's lost credibility has been indifference towards a test which is attempting to change education policy nationwide. Although many teachers expect the PARCC to become a graduation requirement in the future, once it has been implemented and evaluated more thoroughly, their advice to students currently is to simply not study for the test, or even spend the time to try their hardest during testing - after all, the scores will not be used. By conducting interviews, we found that some elementary school teachers who felt that the writing portions of the test were too strenuous for the grade levels in which they were given told students to simply not complete writing sections. As the test results are not representative of students' or teachers' best efforts, the PARCC cannot be properly evaluated.

IV. Stakeholders, Equity, and Efficiency

The quality of standardized testing in our public education system directly impacts students, their parents/guardians, teachers, unions, administrators, and the Maryland Department of Education (MSDE). Colleges and universities in Maryland and across the nation are also affected by the extent of our students' preparedness for postsecondary education, just as employers are affected by our students' readiness for a career. Should the PARCC exam become a common part of college acceptance, or be considered by employers as a measure of a student's critical thinking ability, then all students will have a tremendous stake in performing well on the exam and teachers, administrators, and the MSDE will all be accountable for ensuring their success.

PARCC testing under Common Core is intended to provide security and increase public welfare. The PARCC provides security to students by assuring them that they will receive a

quality education and be successful in college and/or future careers.²⁶ However, the main function of the PARCC under Common Core is to address equity and efficiency. The goal to provide equal, high quality education to all individuals by holding every student to the same expectation and helping educators identify achievement gaps is clearly conveyed by the concept behind both PARCC and Common Core. With this, the PARCC also aims to improve efficiency by increasing accountability for schools and teachers in the classroom, giving students a better education without increasing investment of time or money.

The goals of equity and efficiency are not without their conflicts or complications, and that is no less the case here. Instead of letting the public school “market” provide the level of quality education without regulation, PARCC implements new standards, incurring both start-up costs and ongoing costs for constant regulation in order to improve education and equity, as each student is held to the same rigorous standards regardless of income, race, etc.

There are ambiguities in determining costs and benefits of standardized testing, including the value of an hour of instruction, the value of a test score, and the waste created by the increase of a program.²⁷ Many argue that testing might not be the most efficient way to reflect school quality or student ability, dollar for dollar, and even most proponents of standardized testing believe that the PARCC is not the most efficient method of determining student achievement. This leads to concerns from various teacher unions, such as American Federation of Teachers.²⁸ The assumption that test scores reflect teaching ability is also alarming to teachers, who now have incentives to falsify scores and who are aware that not all students perform their best on structured, high-stakes tests. This leads to the necessity of checking validity and accuracy of scores, creating even more inefficiency.²⁹ Others voice concerns regarding the ability of schools to provide computers in order to accommodate online testing, and the disproportionate burden on low-income schools to provide such computers. Proponents, however, say this process is inevitable as part of implementing a national standard of testing, and argue that these short term costs will hopefully lead to a more efficient way to compare school qualities across the nation.³⁰

V. Reforms for Improvement

The current format, content, and administration of the PARCC exam are clearly in need of reform in order to give the test credibility as a usable measure of student and teacher

performance. We believe that the following reforms, which are supported by analyses of the test and feedback from teachers, unions, and administrators, will result in an efficient and minimally intrusive test which provides teachers and administrators with accurate and actionable feedback.

1. *Use multiple readability measures* in order to ensure that passages in reading comprehension assessments are truly appropriate for the grade level being tested. Other possible readability measures include the Fry Readability Graph (Fry) and the Flesch-Kincaid Readability Tests (FK). This will also test various DOKs and give teachers a better understanding of where there are gaps in learning.
2. *Allow proctors to end a testing segment* before the allotted time has expired, provided that all students have finished working, to minimize time spent in testing and remove wasted time. This has been identified by teachers as an easy way to reduce the time required for PARCC testing.
3. *Increase availability of sample tests*, especially examples of reading passages and math word problems, to teachers, parents, and students in order to allow for thorough preparation.
4. *Remove writing passages* from assessments in grades 3-5, decreasing the strain on younger students who are not accustomed to standardized testing and the time that these young students spend in testing.
5. *Provide pencil-and-paper exams* for any school and grade level upon request, in order to avoid the technological challenges which plague the PARCC and the barrier to entry that an online-only test creates. This will also decrease the effects of financial inequity by making it easier for lower income schools to provide tests.

VI. Best and Worst Case Scenarios

The best possible outcome for Maryland is a universally accepted, rigorous test which thoroughly determines achievement of Common Core standards and can be administered without requiring use of instructional time for test preparation. This test, while requiring students to have a thorough knowledge of expected material and a firm grasp of the concepts which they are expected to have mastered, will not prove to be overly strenuous, especially to younger students who are not accustomed to extended standardized testing.

In the worst possible scenario, Maryland is left with a test even less efficient than the PARCC through some combination of higher costs and lower standards, most likely because of rushed creation of either an updated PARCC or a new Maryland assessment. The test increases strain on students relative to the value of the test score, is difficult to take and administer, and requires teachers to dedicate a harmful amount of time to preparation for the test.

VII. What Can We Do?

A. Increase Accountability

We believe that standardized testing should be given a direct impact on each student's academic progress in order to promote accountability and give the test relevance. We recommend that whichever standardized test is adopted be made a requirement for a high school diploma in Maryland, as was the PARCC's predecessor, the HSA. This option would encourage students and teachers to do their best work preparing for and taking this assessment, and would truly hold students accountable for knowledge of the content. In the case of the PARCC exam, we envision a certain subject test being taken in each grade 9-11 in order to determine knowledge of core subjects - for example, Biology in 9th grade, Algebra II in 10th, and English in 11th. This strategy should not be implemented until Maryland is certain that it has selected a thorough and streamlined test.

B. Hold Our Position

Maryland has already started to implement the PARCC test, and is in the process of adding Geometry, English 9, Algebra II, and English 11 as optional subject tests in order to fully evaluate students. Under the current policy, 11th grade testing is required, but may be waived for students who take the SAT as a college preparedness exam.³¹ By maintaining this policy and avoiding large changes, Maryland will continue to experience the issues which have arisen with the PARCC, but will have an inexpensive and established method of evaluating students and will receive the benefits of being a part of the PARCC consortium, including recognition of the test across state borders. This does not incur additional costs or affect the state's ability to make changes at another time, should doing so become necessary.

C. Improve the PARCC

Maryland's current status as a governing member of the PARCC consortium positions the state to encourage large scale changes to the test, especially as Maryland is now one of only 11 members of the PARCC consortium.³² Maryland's secretary of the Maryland Higher Education Commission sits on the Advisory Committee for College Readiness within PARCC, a committee tasked with making the PARCC exam an acceptable measure of college preparedness. As such, Maryland, in cooperation with the other remaining PARCC states, has the option to push for a test which reflects the desired reforms. PARCC is currently modifying testing manuals and the administration plan in response to teacher, parent, and student feedback, but has not revealed any impending changes to the content or structure of the assessment.^{33,34} This course of action would require the Department of Education and Higher Education Commission to dedicate additional resources to development of the PARCC, and creates potential for disagreement among the members of the consortium regarding content and structure changes to the exams. This option would also preserve the current value of the test as a cross-state benchmark.

D. Join the SBAC

The Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) began in the same way as the PARCC consortium in 2010, with the same goals as PARCC, and also received federal funding for the creation of a test. The consortium's 15 member states are California, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Idaho, Michigan, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Vermont, Washington, and West Virginia, as well as the U.S. Virgin Islands. Although the SBAC has higher membership than the PARCC, it has faced similar difficulties with attrition: at its peak, the SBAC was comprised of over 30 members, showing that it too has lost approximately half of its membership over 5 years.³⁵ Opt-outs have also proven to be problematic for the SBAC. Many high schools in the state of Washington, where the test began, saw a majority of high-school students either opt out of the test formally or not attend on testing days.^{36,37} The SBAC administers its test electronically, in the same manner as the PARCC, which invites all of the same technical and logistical issues which arose during the 2014-15 administration of the PARCC.

However, the SBAC has been noticeably more successful in its construction and implementation than the PARCC exam. The computer malfunctions and failure to properly test

which have plagued the PARCC have not arisen with the SBAC, and although the tests are generally considered to be challenging, they are appropriate to grade level as determined by the common core standards. Despite the SBAC test being superior to the PARCC assessment, we do not recommend that Maryland join the SBAC because the organization has experienced many of the same challenges as the PARCC, and has similarly lost support over time, to the point where it only nominally serves as a national test.

E. Create a New Test

Maryland may also choose to follow Indiana's example by leaving the PARCC consortium and choosing to create its own test. This course of action would require the Department of Education and Higher Education Commission to dedicate additional resources to creating a test which aligns with Common Core standards, and would require the state to accept the cost of administering and grading the test, as well as analyzing results and evaluating and updating the examination itself. A 2015 estimate by the Ohio Legislative Commission estimated that creation of each new test would cost between \$500,000 and \$750,000, and as such development of a new standardized test would likely cost between \$9 million and \$15 million.

The interstate recognition of Maryland's test would also be lost, as it would again be state-specific, as in the days of the Maryland School Assessment (MSA) and High School Assessment (HSA). However, this option would allow Maryland to make the necessary changes to the test (which could use the PARCC as a baseline) without needing agreement from other states and would create a unique opportunity to "rebrand" standardized testing. Because the PARCC has gained a highly negative image among stakeholders and in the public eye, creating a new test "Just for Maryland" would allow the state to tell teachers, unions, administrators, etc. that their concerns have been heard and a new test is being created to address their issues. This rebranding would create more positive public relations than the adoption of a pre-made test, as this method would allow input from all Maryland stakeholders. The PARCC exam would remain in place as an interim until such time as the Maryland exam has been field tested and deemed ready for use in schools.

We believe that this option, while superior to maintenance of the PARCC exam, is not Maryland's best choice. Creation of a new test would require extensive resources from the state

and the Department of Education, and would most likely not result in a new test being implemented until at least the 2017-18 school year. As seen in Indiana, a state which pursued this option, creation of a new test may lead to administrative problems similar to those of the PARCC, including excessively long examinations and software glitches. By instead adopting a proven test such as the ACT Aspire, Maryland will be able to quickly replace the PARCC with a proven assessment.

Case Study: Indiana

In 2012, Indiana decided to remove itself from the PARCC and Common Core national standards. Indiana chose to write its own tests, forgoing the opportunity of pilot questions. The PARCC test was thus rebranded by the Indiana Department of Education as the Indiana Statewide Testing for Educational Progress Plus (ISTEP +). In 2013 the ISTEP received federal funding under Race To The Top (RTTT). This standardized test was based off of the state's former test under No Child Left Behind³⁸, but saw a controversial change in format which caused the test to be longer than the PARCC, taking approximately 12 hours to complete. Furthermore, students would be subjected to questions that would actually count towards their scores. Consequently, parents and educators came together which persuaded the Governor to review the state's exams. Indiana hired two national testing experts to review the ISTEP +. The test is now six and a half hours long, which is slightly shorter than the PARCC.³⁹ The Department of Education factors in about 900 hours of instructional time and sees the test length as reasonable, but it seems that the testing length is still up for debate; there are indications that Indiana might be attempting to lengthen the test for the 2015-2016 school year.⁴⁰

The test is administered in March and April with both written and multiple choice components. Grades 3-8 are tested for English and math each year, while Grades 4 and 6 receive a science test and 5 and 7 are required to take a social studies test. Another test is available for students with disabilities, called the IMAST. The ISTEP+ Graduation Qualifying exam is also a component; however, it is not necessary to graduation from a public high school.⁴¹ Although not a detriment to graduation, if a student fails the test, there were mandatory remedial classes until the student passes. In 2009, the qualifying exam was replaced by two End of the Course Assessments (ECAs) for Algebra I and English 10, and in 2012, biology became a requirement

for year 9 students.⁴² While not a requirement for graduation, biology does fulfill the federal requirement for high school science testing.

Similar to the PARCC, ISTEP+ experienced computer glitches in 2011 and 2013 which led to controversy from the public. In 2011 the Spring 5th and 8th grade multiple choice portions of the ISTEP+ experienced technical challenges, and in April 2013 78,000 students experienced interruptions throughout the testing period, accounting for 16% of all online test takers.

Partly as a result of these glitches, a major concern for Indiana is the contract for creating the ISTEP+. Since 2009, CTB-McGraw Hill has created the test, with a \$95 million contract that expired in 2014.⁴³ ISTEP+ is estimated to cost \$22 million, while IMAST is estimated to cost \$1.5 million.⁴⁴ There are additional costs for two other types of reading tests: IREAD-4 is the fundamental reading skill assessment which has an estimated cost of \$650,000 and LAS is required for English Language Learners which has an estimated cost of \$1 million dollars.

Funding comes from both the federal and state government. Indiana allocates \$46.2 million out of its \$6.6 billion state budget to education funding each year. In 2011, Indiana received an estimated \$351 million in Title I funds and \$264 million under Individuals with Disabilities Education Act funding. In other words, for every \$46 from the state, about \$615 (1,337 percent of the state's spending) is spent by the federal government. Because of the costs involved, we do not recommend creation of a new test in Maryland.

F. Adopt a Third-Party Test

As the PARCC's membership and credibility fall, Maryland may remove itself from the PARCC consortium and adopt a new series of standardized exams, which are aligned to Common Core standards. Doing so, would help the State of Maryland avoid the excessive resource drain imposed by the PARCC at the classroom level. We believe that this is the best option for Maryland. Several states across the nation have left PARCC behind, and each of them has had to face the challenge of choosing a new standardized test. One leading option for those states which choose not to create their own tests is the ACT Aspire assessment, a series of standardized tests for students in grades 3-10 that prepare students to take the ACT College Preparedness Test, which is recognized nationally by college admissions offices.⁴⁵ In July 2015, The Arkansas State Board of Education chose this same option, voting to adopt the ACT Aspire as the sole source of standardized testing for the 2015-16 school year. States may also use other

private standardized tests such as the STAR assessments or the Stanford Achievement Tests (SAT-10). However, we recommend that Maryland adopt the ACT Aspire assessment, which has already been proven effective in 33 states for hundreds of thousands of students. We do not recommend the STAR assessment or SAT-10 as neither is aligned with Common Core standards. A new version of the STAR, which will align with Common Core, is being created, but is not yet ready for administration. Furthermore, we recommend an open forum be held prior to the selection of a test, in order to allow teachers, parents, and other stakeholders to have a chance to learn about the options open to the state and express their views on the appropriate test. This open forum will allow the everyday stakeholders in standardized testing to get the best deal for education in Maryland, and let teachers, administrators, and unions express their concerns and be involved in the process of selecting Maryland's standardized assessment, which will prevent the public outcry which accompanied the PARCC exams.

To remove PARCC testing from Maryland Education the Governor would enact an Executive Order stating that the State of Maryland will no longer be participating in the PARCC consortium, but rather will be looking to purchase a new test. After this happens, the Maryland Department of Education will look for new test providers and search for a more appropriate exam for the state. After an exam is chosen, the school system will implement the new exam as a graduation requirement. Two passing thresholds will be created for this exam by qualified teachers from across the state. The first standard will determine what score is considered proficient for passing in high school, thus allowing a student to fulfill their graduation requirement. This threshold should be determined by a high school teacher work group. The second standard will determine what constitutes college and career readiness, and will be determined by a work group of college professors and upper level high school teachers.⁴⁶ This approach to standardized testing would alleviate many of the problems the State finds it is having with the PARCC exams. A performance-based system such as this would incentivize students to perform to the best of their ability, giving us more accurate data, which can be used to improve our education system. This option would also allow Maryland test scores to remain transferrable across state borders, as the ACT Aspire test has been used by schools in the majority of states. While this option may not be easily accepted by teachers who are already wary of new tests, the test already has a proven track record in other parts of the nation, so these concerns should be minimal.

VIII. Conclusion

Maryland is in the process of implementing a new standardized testing system (the PARCC) and has joined a consortium of states to create tests which coincide with Common Core State Standards. Though noble in theory, the PARCC assessment has failed in both design and implementation: it has proven to be difficult to administer, excessively long, lacking in incentives for students and teachers, and no longer qualifies as a national standard, which defeats the purpose of its implementation altogether. Based on the criteria of time, accountability, cost, technical constraints, and national recognition, we have determined that the ACT Aspire, or a similar test, is superior to PARCC.

We encourage the following steps to be taken to implement this change:

- 1) An action by the Governor to rid the state of the PARCC. This can be accomplished by banning funding of the PARCC assessment, as was done in Ohio, or strictly by executive order as seen in Texas.
- 2) Creation of a MSDE Committee to review all available exams to select and exam that correlates with Maryland's goals and with Common Core standards.
- 3) Invitation of teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders to testify before the MSDE committee to voice their preferences, comments and expectations.
- 4) Inclusion of the new state test in the Maryland Budget
- 5) Implementation of this exam statewide

IX. Policy Matrix:

	Status Quo	Improvement	SBAC	Third-Party	Maryland Test
Cost	Low	Low	Low	Moderate	High
Technological Failures	Problematic	Moderate	Minimal	Minimal	Negligible
National Adoption	10 States	10e States	16 States	33 States	Maryland Only
Flexibility	None	Limited	None	None	Complete
Buy In: Teacher Approval	None	Limited	Limited	Significant	Significant

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