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# Sorting through PARCC vs. MCAS

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**By Globe staff**

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## What's the difference between MCAS and PARCC?

The Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System is a standardized test that has been administered to public school students statewide for the past 18 years. It is considered to be a strong educational tool. But over time, concern has grown that instructors have become too focused on teaching students how to do well on the test.

About half of the state's school districts this past spring tested out another exam called PARCC. The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers aims to delve into how students arrived at their answers and, state officials say, requires more critical-thinking skills than the MCAS. It is aligned with the Common Core educational standards adopted by the state in 2010 and backed by a shrinking consortium of other states.

Unlike the MCAS, which is a paper-based exam, the PARCC is designed to be taken online.

## Why do we need a new test?

Many state education officials believe that the MCAS, the state's gold-standard, has reached a point of diminishing returns and that a new generation of a test is needed to better reflect the academic expectations of higher education and employers.

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“As I see in my visits to schools and as I hear from educators and parents, too often the response to MCAS is instruction designed to teach students to succeed on the test rather than instruction designed to meet the learning standards,” Education Commissioner Mitchell Chester said.

Chester believes that including elements of the PARCC in a new proficiency test would be a substantial advancement over the current MCAS. The hybrid test, he says, sets a higher bar for student performance and provides more opportunity for critical thinking, application of knowledge, research, and connections between reading and writing.

### **What happens next?**

Districts that gave PARCC a trial run this spring would do so again for spring 2016, and districts that stuck with MCAS would continue to use it unless they choose to administer PARCC.

In the meantime, the state plans to develop the new MCAS 2.0 English and mathematics assessments to be administered in all schools beginning spring 2017.

Students would have to pass to graduate, but districts would not be declared underperforming on the basis of test scores until 2018.

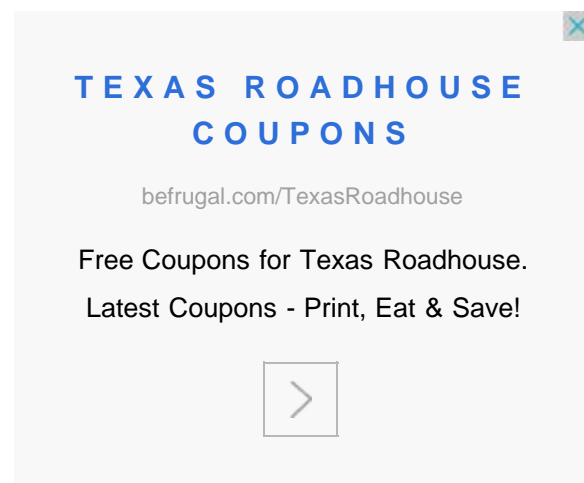
The education board also voted to commit to having computer-based tests roll out statewide by spring 2019.

The state said it plans to award a contract to develop the next-generation assessment and convene groups of teachers, college professors, and assessment experts to advise the state on developing statewide tests. The state will also discuss the timing for reinstating a history and social science test.

The state will remain a member of PARCC consortium.

### **How much will it cost the state to create the test?**

That remains unclear, although concerns have been raised about the potential cost for taxpayers. Chester said this month that he did not have an estimate of the expense but that the price tag could



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be kept down by relying on many existing elements of the PARCC.

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