1. **What is included in the draft PARCC Accommodations Manual and what information is the Manual designed to provide?**

The draft *PARCC Accommodations Manual* is a comprehensive policy document that will support local educators in the selection, administration, and evaluation of accommodations for the assessment of students with disabilities (SWD) and English learners (ELs) on the computer-delivered PARCC End-of-Year, Performance-Based-Assessment, and Mid-Year assessment components.

The Manual provides educators with information on the accommodations which, when used on the PARCC End-of-Year, Performance-Based-Assessment, and Mid-Year assessment, will result in a valid score for a student.

The majority of the proposed accommodations policies are currently in use across PARCC states. What is different from many current state accommodations manuals, however, is that the Manual includes not only proposed participation and accommodations policies for SWD and ELs, but also information about tools that will be provided through PARCC’s computer-based assessment delivery system for all students to optimize their performance on the assessments. By assessing students on computer devices, PARCC states will now have the opportunity to provide all students with tools they frequently use in the classroom and daily life that were once provided only as accommodations for SWD and ELs (e.g., highlighters and enlarged font).

2. **Why did PARCC states develop a common accommodations manual?**

When PARCC states came together to form the consortium in 2010, they each signed a Memorandum of Understanding in which they committed to develop and implement common policies and procedures for administration of the assessments, including common participation policies and accommodations policies for SWD and ELs. These common participation and accommodations policies are important to establish equitable access as well as comparability of results for all students, schools, districts and states in the PARCC consortium.

3. **What are accommodations, and who is eligible to receive them?**

**Accommodations for Students with Disabilities**

Accommodations are practices and procedures that change presentation, response, setting, and/or timing/scheduling of assessments and are intended to provide equitable access during instruction and assessments for students with disabilities (i.e., students with Individualized Education Programs [IEP] or 504 plans). A brief description of each category is described below:
• **Presentation accommodations** include allowable changes in the method or format in which the test or test questions are provided to the student. These may include, for example, the use of braille or sign interpretation of test items.

• **Response accommodations** include allowable changes in the method used by the student to provide responses to test questions. These may include dictating responses to a scribe or using a braille note-taker.

• **Timing and Scheduling accommodations** include extending the duration of time allowed for testing, allowing a student to take frequent breaks, or to take the test at a certain time of day.

• **Setting accommodations** include changes to the location or conditions in which the test is administered, including separate location or group size.

• **Special access accommodations** include accommodations that expand access to the test for a small number of students with disabilities in the areas of reading, writing, and calculating who require additional supports and meet certain criteria, as noted by the IEP/504 plan teams.

Accommodations are intended to reduce or even eliminate the effects of a student’s disability in allowing them to demonstrate their knowledge and skills; however, they do not reduce learning expectations. IEP and 504 team members should attempt whenever possible to provide the same accommodations for classroom instruction, classroom assessments, and PARCC assessments. Student scores will be counted and aggregated alongside scores of students who did not receive accommodations.

**Accommodations for English Learners**

Accommodations are practices and procedures that provide equitable access during instruction and assessments for ELs and provide a valid means for ELs to show what they know and can do. Accommodations are intended to provide support to students with developing English language proficiency in the classroom and on state assessments in terms of their access to instructional or test content, interactions with content, and response to content. Once an EL becomes English proficient, the accommodation may no longer be necessary.

Effective accommodations for ELs should meet three conditions:

• Reduce the linguistic load necessary to access the content of the curriculum or assessment;

• Do not alter what is measured by the test (i.e., the construct), or the test itself. As a result, scores of students receiving accommodations should be included and reported together with scores of students not receiving accommodations; and

• Address the unique linguistic and socio-cultural needs of an EL student by reducing the effects of English language skills on the student’s overall performance on the assessment (i.e., “construct irrelevant variance”)

4. **What are embedded supports, and who is eligible to receive them?**

An **embedded support** is a tool, support, scaffold, or preference that is built into the assessment system that can be activated by any student, at his or her own discretion. Embedded supports are Universal Design features that are expected to benefit a diverse array of students and are available to all students. They are provided onscreen, stored in a toolbar, or are accessible through a menu or control panel, as needed. During the assessment, students can choose which embedded supports they need for specific items. Examples include: audio amplification, highlighting, pop-up glossary, etc.
5. **What are accessibility features, and who is eligible to receive them?**

Like embedded supports, accessibility features are available to *all students* (i.e., not limited to students with IEPs, 504 plans, EL plans), but will be selected and “turned on” by a school-based educator prior to the assessment, based on each student’s Personal Needs Profile (PNP). Accessibility features should be selected by school-based educators (e.g. classroom teachers, and staff members of IEP teams, 504 plan teams, English learner educators, and EL teams, if applicable) based on individual needs, and with input from the student.

Based on each student’s individual needs, a PNP is created for the student to ensure that he or she receives appropriate access without the distraction of other tools and features that are *not* required by the student. Although a school-based educator will enable specific accessibility features for students, the student will decide whether or not to use the feature. Accessibility features will be readily available on the computer-delivered testing platform.

Individualizing access needs for the assessment provides increased opportunities for each student to accurately demonstrate knowledge and skills, and will reduce the chances of giving students incorrect accommodations or supports on the day of the test. Examples of accessibility features include: answer masking, background/font color, line reader, etc.

6. **Who selects accommodations and accessibility features for students?**

**Accommodations for Students with Disabilities**

IEP team and 504 plan team members are responsible for selecting accommodations for both instruction and assessment. To ensure that students with disabilities are engaged in standards-based instruction and assessments, all IEP/504 team members should be knowledgeable about the CCSS, the PARCC assessments, and the school district’s aligned curricula.

Effective decision-making on the provision of appropriate accommodations begins with gathering and reviewing information about the student’s present level of academic achievement, functional performance in relation to the CCSS and the supports the student requires during instruction and classroom assessment. The process of selecting accommodations is one in which members of the IEP/504 team attempt to “level the playing field” for a student with a disability so he or she can participate in the general education curriculum. Team meetings could include discussions about providing the student equal learning opportunities, and identifying practices and approaches intended to help the student overcome learning obstacles during instruction and assessment.

The draft *PARCC Accommodations Manual* outlines accommodations that will, when used during the PARCC assessments, result in a valid and reliable score. For more detailed information, please see Section 3, Step 3 of the draft *PARCC Accommodations Manual*.

**Accommodations for English Learners**

Decisions about testing accommodations for ELs should be made by more than one individual in a school/district. Individuals familiar with the student (e.g., in some states, an EL team) could be convened to identify the appropriate accommodations for each EL student based on a student’s needs and English proficiency level. The educators working with the student are also responsible for documenting accommodations made available to the student.

[http://parcconline.org](http://parcconline.org)
Determining appropriate linguistic support for ELs during routine classroom instruction and assessment is facilitated by gathering and reviewing information about the student and the student’s level of performance in relation to district and state academic standards. The process of determining the amount and types of instructional and assessment support involves attempts by local educators to “level the playing field” for the student so he or she can participate in the general education curriculum and assessments.

Effective decision making regarding the provision of appropriate test accommodations for an EL student by a student’s educators (or a team of educators, if appropriate) begins well before the day of the assessment. Once eligibility for accommodations has been established, as noted in Step 2 of the Manual (Learn About Different Supports Available to All Students and to ELs on PARCC Assessments), the selection of accommodations should be based on the guidance in this section of the Manual.

**Accessibility Features for All Participating Students**

Accessibility features will be selected and “turned on” by a school-based educator (e.g. classroom teachers, and staff members of IEP teams, 504 plan teams, English learner educators, and EL teams, if applicable) prior to the assessment, based on each student’s Personal Needs Profile (PNP). For an accessibility feature to be appropriate, the student should have had access to the feature during instruction and not be exposed to it for the first time during the assessment.

Additional administrative guidance on the selection process for developing PNPs will be included in the *PARCC Test Administration Manual*.

7. **Will PARCC share additional guidance around implementation of the policies in the draft Manual?**

The Manual is a proposed policy document, so full administrative guidance is not included in the document at this time. In summer 2013, PARCC states and key stakeholders will review and vet a number of appendices to the Manual which will be designed to support states and districts in the implementation of the policies.

Additional information on administering the PARCC assessments will be included in the *PARCC Test Administration Manual* and in the *PARCC Style Guide*. To further support states, PARCC will be developing an online professional development module on the accommodations policies. However, professional development around specific state policies for selecting, administering, evaluating, and monitoring the policies will be done at the state level. Please contact your state education agency for additional information.

8. **What if my student/child needs to use an accommodation on the PARCC assessments not listed in the draft PARCC Accommodations Manual?**

While the Manual is intended to be comprehensive, PARCC states understand that there are unique situations in which a student may require an accommodation not included in the Manual. PARCC states will review requests for unique accommodations in their respective states on an individual basis and will provide approval after determining whether the accommodation would result in a valid score for the student. Information on unique accommodations and the unique accommodation form is included in the Manual.
9. Will PARCC provide accommodation policies for students who need to test via paper and pencil?

The expectation is that all students will take the PARCC assessments on a computer. Among many other advantages, computer-based testing will be engaging for students, result in lower costs and ultimately allow for faster scoring and reporting of results. However, the PARCC assessments will be available in paper and pencil format for students with disabilities whose IEP/504 plans require it, and for schools that have gained approval for paper and pencil-based testing from their State Educational Agency (SEA). An appendix is being developed to provide accommodation policy guidance for students who will need to test via paper and pencil.

10. Will PARCC allow translations of the assessments in languages other than English?

The policy regarding the translation of PARCC assessments into languages other than English is still being discussed among PARCC states. Many states have current state laws, regulations or policy that either require or prohibit translations of state assessments. PARCC’s policy concerning translations will be included in the first edition of the PARCC Accommodations Manual in summer 2013.

11. What was the process PARCC used to develop the draft Manual?

To begin development on the Manual, PARCC carefully analyzed the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and the claims on the PARCC Performance-Based and End-of-Year assessment components in both mathematics and English language arts/literacy, conducted a policy scan on currently available accommodations across all PARCC states, and synthesized the most current research on accommodations for SWD and ELs.

The full draft PARCC Accommodations Manual for Students with Disabilities and English Learners released for public comment was developed and reviewed over the past year through an iterative process involving the following groups of PARCC stakeholders:

- State experts serving on the PARCC Accommodations, Accessibility and Fairness Operational Working Group;
- K-12 PARCC State Leads;
- Additional state agency experts (including special education and English learner experts);
- External experts, including English learner expert Lynn Shafer Willner, the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) and the PARCC Technical Working Groups on Equity, English Learners and Students with Disabilities;
- National advocacy groups for SWD, ELs, and equity and fairness; and
- Staff from PARCC’s project management partner Achieve.

While the development of the manual was led by the PARCC state representatives comprising the Accessibility, Accommodations, and Fairness Operational Working Group, additional input was solicited from the PARCC Educator Leader Cadres; from educators and community members through two public comment periods; from national experts in assessment and instruction for special populations; and with advocacy organizations/national stakeholders through briefings and meetings.
12. How did PARCC respond to the public comments provided on the special access accommodations earlier this year?

PARCC received over 3,600 individual surveys and approximately 20 pieces of written feedback from national organizations on the special access accommodations (reading, writing, and calculator use) that were released for public comment in January and February 2013. As part of their commitment to providing technical assistance to states, the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) reviewed and synthesized all of the data from the public comment period and provided a detailed report to PARCC, which included a list of considerations for PARCC as the draft Manual was developed. The team of researchers, led by Martha Thurlow, provided rapid feedback to PARCC. They have also committed to synthesizing the public comment on the Manual this spring.

The major themes and considerations from the January-February comment period on the special access accommodations were reviewed by:

- State experts serving on the PARCC Accommodations, Accessibility and Fairness Operational Working Group;
- K-12 PARCC State Leads;
- Additional state agency experts (including SEA special education and English learner experts);
- PARCC Technical Working Groups on Equity, English Learners and Students with Disabilities;
- National advocacy groups for SWD, ELs, and equity and fairness; and
- Staff from PARCC’s project management partner Achieve.

Prior to releasing the Manual for public comment, PARCC held small group and one-on-one meetings with organizations that provided written feedback during the first two comment periods. These conversations helped to clarify feedback, address revisions made to the draft policies, and create opportunities for ongoing dialogue between the PARCC states and the organizations.

The draft Manual released on April 18th reflects changes made based on the synthesis of the public comments on the special access accommodations.

13. Whom should I contact if I have questions about computer-delivered assessments and technology readiness?

Please contact your state’s Technology Readiness Coordinator for more information about your state’s transition plan to computer-delivered assessments. Additional guidance on technology and the Assessment Administration Capacity Planning Tool can be found on the PARCC website at http://www.parcconline.org/technology and http://www.parcconline.org/assessment-administration-guidance.

14. How can I provide feedback on the draft PARCC Accommodations Manual?

PARCC welcomes all feedback on the draft PARCC Accommodations Manual. The feedback period is open from April 18 through 5:00 pm EDT on May 13, 2013. To share comments on the proposed accommodations policies for students with disabilities, the proposed accommodations policies for English learners, or both sections of the Manual, please visit http://parcconline.org/parcc-draft-accommodations-manual. If you are providing feedback on both sections, you will need to complete two separate feedback surveys.