NEW JERSEY'S ONLINE PARCC ROLLOUT GOES OFF WITHOUT A HITCH
John Mooney | New Jersey Spotlight | MARCH 27, 2014

Minor problems typically limited to computer glitches; participants give deployment of statewide test fairly high marks

New Jersey’s first venture into statewide online testing can be characterized as -- so far, so good.

The field testing of the new PARCC examinations -- named after the consortium of states that make up the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career -- started on Monday in hundreds of New Jersey schools.

PARCC Field Test Updates
The dry run is taking place in 14 states across the country, a critical trial for the new exams tied to the Common Core State Standards. A full launch is planned for 2015.

And at least in this trial, New Jersey has been leading the way. In the first two days, New Jersey had more students than any other state taking the practice tests, with more than 7,000 students sitting for the tests a day, as much as a fifth of the daily nationwide total so far.

What's more, although the first run was not without glitches, early reports indicate that things went pretty well.

"By and large, I am extraordinarily pleased and grateful to districts for the level of effort that schools have put into this," said Bari Erlichson, the assistant state education commissioner who has overseen the rollout.

She said there were some issues, mostly local ones as to whether one district or another had the right technology to complete the testing. Erlichson said it came down in some cases to issues as simple as whether certain Internet filters were in place.

New Jersey had been explicit in allowing districts to use different operating systems and computers, all of which come with their own challenges, Erlichson said.

“There were very local lessons learned,” she said yesterday. “Things like whether virus filters were in the way, or the use of headphones.”

The rollout drew considerable chatter from districts and educators, both in direct feedback to the state and through Twitter and other social media. A call center manned by Pearson Education, the administrator of the field test, was taking hundreds -- if not thousands -- of daily calls as well.

Westfield was one of the districts participating in the rollout, with unexpectedly good results. “There comes with this a certain element of relief, but I will say we are feeling very comfortable,” said Paul Pineiro, Westfield’s assistant superintendent.

He did say there were some challenges. For instance, students weren’t so sure how to enter numerical fractions into the online questions.

“But in the end, that’s why we’re here – to field test it,” he said.
PARCC has been maintaining a daily update of the field tests on its website. Yesterday, it said that students had been giving short shrift to writing sections that demand more extensive responses.

“PARCC has received numerous reports of students completing the (language arts) sessions in times that indicate many students are not writing extended, well-developed responses,” the update read yesterday.

Erlichson said there was a learning curve for New Jersey districts as well.

“This has been a confidence building moment for us, and for schools,” she said. “New Jersey hasn’t had a history of [online] testing in general, and this is confidence building for all of us.”