



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

*Adopted by the PARCC Governing Board and Advisory Committee on College Readiness
October 25, 2012; revised November 2015*

The PARCC draft College- and Career-Ready (CCR) Determination Policy and Policy-Level Performance Level Descriptors (PLDs) were released for public feedback in summer and fall 2012. PARCC received nearly 800 responses from K-12 educators, higher education faculty, parents, and community members. The revised CCR Determination Policy and Policy-Level PLDs, adopted in October 2012, was used by PARCC to guide the development of items and tasks for the PARCC assessments in both English language arts/literacy (ELA/literacy) and mathematics and also served as a guidepost for setting the performance levels for the PARCC assessments.

The **PARCC CCR Determinations in ELA/literacy and mathematics** describe the academic knowledge, skills, and practices in English language arts/literacy and mathematics students must demonstrate to show they are able to enter directly into and succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing courses and relevant technical courses in those content areas at two- and four-year public institutions of higher education. The CCR Determination will provide policymakers, educators, parents, and students with a clear signal about the level of academic preparation needed for success in these postsecondary courses. It will provide a strong indicator of college and career readiness that can be used to set performance goals at any level and show progress towards those goals. Finally, students who attain a CCR Determination in ELA/literacy and/or mathematics will have a tangible benefit – direct entry into relevant entry-level, credit-bearing courses without need for remediation.

The **Policy-Level PLDs** include policy claims, which describe the educational implications for students who attain a particular performance level on the PARCC assessments. These PLDs are used by PARCC to guide the development of items and tasks for the PARCC assessments and formed the basis for standard-setting. They were also used as a foundation for the development of PARCC's grade- and subject-specific PLDs, which profile the knowledge, skills and practices students performing at a given performance level in a specific course or grade level are able to demonstrate. The grade- and subject-specific PLDs are an important tool for K-12 and postsecondary educators, parents, and students to gain a better understanding of the performance expectations for the PARCC assessments and how student mastery of the CCSS is evaluated through PARCC. The student assessment scores reported by performance level for schools and school districts for each grade and subject will also be important components of state accountability and public reporting systems, and numerous other state-specific policies that use student performance results.

I. College- and Career-Ready Determinations in English Language Arts/Literacy and Mathematics Policy

Meaning of the College- and Career-Ready Determinations

A student who is determined to be College- and Career-Ready through performance on the PARCC high school assessments is one who has demonstrated the *academic* knowledge, skills, and practices in ELA/literacy or mathematics necessary to enter directly into and succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing courses in those content areas in programs leading to a credential or degree¹ from two- and four-year public² institutions of higher education. PARCC will make College- and Career-Ready Determinations in ELA/literacy and in mathematics.

- Students who earn a College- and Career-Ready Determination in ELA/literacy will have demonstrated the academic knowledge, skills and practices necessary to enter directly into and succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing courses in College English Composition, Literature, and technical courses requiring college-level reading and writing.
- Students who earn a College- and Career-Ready Determination in mathematics will have demonstrated the academic knowledge, skills and practices necessary to enter directly into and succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing courses in College Algebra, Introductory College Statistics, and technical courses requiring an equivalent level of mathematics³.

It must be noted that the academic knowledge, skills, and practices defined by the PARCC CCR Determinations in ELA/literacy and mathematics are an essential part of students' readiness for college and careers, but do not encompass the full range of knowledge, skills, and practices students need for success in postsecondary programs and careers. For example, Conley (2012) includes learning skills and techniques such as persistence, motivation, and time management as critical elements of college and career readiness, along with transition skills and knowledge such as awareness of postsecondary norms and culture and career awareness⁴. The Association of Career Technical Education (2010) includes employability skills and technical skills, as well as academic skills, as critical components of career readiness⁵. A comprehensive determination of college and career readiness that would include additional factors such as these is beyond the scope of the PARCC assessments in ELA/literacy and mathematics. Many states, however, are engaged in identifying these factors

¹ This is inclusive of any public postsecondary institution awarding degrees and/or credentials that are aligned with entry into middle and high skills jobs (i.e. programs that are typically at least one year in length), including public technical colleges/institutions. Apprenticeship and other training programs that lead to middle and high skill jobs are also encouraged to take advantage of the PARCC CCRD Policy in their placement practices. In the future, PARCC may validate the CCRD Policy for such programs, pending the availability of data to do so.

² Private institutions of higher education are also encouraged to use the PARCC CCRD Policy for placing students into the entry-level, credit-bearing courses identified in the policy.

³ PARCC's first priority is to validate the College- and Career-Ready Determination Policy for College Algebra and Introductory Statistics, given relatively high enrollment rates in these courses. However, institutions of higher education are encouraged to use College- and Career-Ready Determinations for placement of students into other entry-level, credit-bearing mathematics courses such as Quantitative Literacy/Mathematics for Liberal Arts. Over time, PARCC may validate the use of the CCR Determination in mathematics for these courses as well.

⁴ David T. Conley (2012). "A Complete Definition of College and Career Readiness." The Educational Policy Improvement Center. <https://www.epiconline.org/readiness/definition.dot>

⁵ ACTE (2010). "What is Career-Ready?" Association of Career and Technical Education. <https://www.acteonline.org/readiness.aspx>

and determining ways to support students in strengthening them as part of a broad agenda to increase college graduation rates and career success.

Since these non-academic factors are so important, PARCC College- and Career-Ready Determinations can only provide an estimate of the likelihood that students who earn them have the academic preparation necessary to succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing courses. Accordingly, the process used to identify the scores on PARCC assessments used to make College- and Career-Ready Determinations was designed to promote confidence in the estimate, realizing that no estimate can be 100 percent accurate. A brief description of the information and process used to establish the scores is provided in the section titled “Determining and Validating College- and Career-Ready Threshold Scores.”

Benefit of Earning a PARCC College- and Career-Ready Determination

One of PARCC’s primary objectives is that students who earn a College- and Career-Ready Determination and are admitted to two- or four-year public institutions of higher education will be exempted from having to take and pass placement tests designed to determine whether they are academically prepared to enter directly into entry-level, credit-bearing courses in ELA/literacy, mathematics, and technical courses requiring college-level reading, writing, or mathematics skills.

The College- and Career-Ready Determination is not being designed to inform postsecondary admission decisions or to exempt students from having to take tests designed to place them into more advanced courses beyond the entry-level.

Criteria Used to Make College- and Career-Ready Determinations

In order to earn and maintain a College- and Career-Ready Determination in ELA/literacy, a student must achieve at least the threshold score for Level 4 on the grade 11 PARCC ELA/literacy assessment.

In order to earn and maintain a College- and Career-Ready Determination in mathematics, a student must achieve at least the threshold score for Level 4 on the PARCC Algebra II or Mathematics III end-of-course assessment, which will include two performance tasks that draw on previous content critical for success in entry-level postsecondary mathematics courses.

Maintaining a College- and Career-Ready Determination

To use the PARCC College- and Career-Ready Determination to place students into entry-level, credit-bearing courses, higher education institutions may impose additional conditions, such as continuous enrollment through graduation from high school in courses offered through dual/concurrent enrollment, or high school courses that build on the standards used to make the College- and Career-Ready Determination.

Determining and Validating College- and Career-Ready Threshold Scores

PARCC followed a systematic standard-setting process to identify the threshold scores, also known as cut scores, on the designated high school assessments that are used for making College- and Career-Ready Determinations.

The standard-setting process began with the development of PARCC performance levels and associated performance level descriptors (PLDs). The PLDs describe the knowledge, skills and practices in ELA/literacy and

mathematics contained in the Common Core State Standards that students performing at each level must be able to demonstrate. PARCC reports results according to five performance levels. The descriptors for Level 4 for grade 11 ELA/literacy, Algebra II, and Mathematics III depict the knowledge, skills and practices that are needed to succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing courses in two- and four-year public institutions of higher education.

The standard-setting process continued with a standard-setting event after the first administration of PARCC, in summer 2015. The event resulted in the identification of recommended threshold scores for all PARCC performance levels and made use of multiple sources of information, including the judgments of K-12 and higher education professionals serving on standard-setting panels, as well as relevant data about how students participating in PARCC assessments perform on other achievement measures. Final threshold scores for each performance level on the PARCC grade 11 ELA/literacy, Algebra II, and Mathematics III assessments were approved by the PARCC Governing Board and Advisory Committee on College Readiness in August 2015. The Governing Board approved threshold scores for the remaining high school assessments in August 2015, and for the grades 3-8 PARCC assessments in September 2015.

The following statement will be used to conduct validation studies of the efficacy of PARCC's College- and Career-Ready Determinations in the future.

Students who earn a College- and Career-Ready Determination by performing at level 4 in grade 11 ELA/literacy and enroll in College English Composition, Literature, and technical courses requiring college-level reading and writing have approximately a 0.75 probability of earning college credit by attaining at least a grade of C or its equivalent in those courses.

Students who earn a PARCC College- and Career-Ready Determination by performing at level 4 in Algebra II or Mathematics III and enroll in College Algebra, Introductory College Statistics, and technical courses requiring an equivalent level of mathematics have approximately a 0.75 probability of earning college credit by attaining at least a grade of C or its equivalent in those courses.

In the statement above, a 0.75 probability of earning a C is used as a *benchmark* against which the CCR cut score on the PARCC assessments will be validated through empirical research. The 0.75 probability of a student earning a C or better was chosen for two reasons. First, a "C" is the minimum grade needed to earn credit for a course (at nearly all postsecondary institutions) -- thus the validation criteria aligns with the college completion agenda at many higher education institutions/systems. Second, the 0.75 probability was chosen, after much discussion, because it is a reasonably high standard but not so high that using it would create a CCR cut 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 indicates that a student's performance on the PARCC assessments will provide a good estimate of academic readiness, but other non-academic skills that contribute to success in college and careers will not be measured by PARCC assessments.

II. Policy-Level Performance Level Descriptors

PARCC reports student achievement on the PARCC assessments using five performance levels. Students performing at Levels 4 and 5 will earn a CCR Determination.

Although many current state assessments report student achievement using three or four performance levels, PARCC uses five levels for a number of reasons:

- PARCC assessments include a sufficient number of score points to support the accurate classification of student performance into five levels;
- 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.

Definitions of Terms

Performance Levels

- Student results on PARCC ELA/literacy and mathematics assessments are reported according to numerical scaled scores and performance levels. Performance levels are used to classify student performances into categories that describe the knowledge, skills and practices that students in the category are typically able to demonstrate, including the consistency with which they can demonstrate these traits. Each PARCC performance level has a specified minimum scaled score associated with it – often referred to as a cut score. Cut scores for PARCC performance levels were determined through a systematic standard-setting process in the summer of 2015. The *policy claims* that follow in the remainder of this document constitute the performance levels and served as the basis for the standard-setting process.

Policy Claims

- *Policy claims* describe the educational implications for students who attain a particular performance level on the PARCC assessments.

Grade- and Subject-Specific Content Claims

- PARCC also developed *content claims* within [grade- and subject-specific performance level descriptors](#). These claims profile the knowledge, skills and practices students performing at a given performance level/course and grade level are able to demonstrate (e.g., grade 4 ELA/literacy, Algebra I). These grade- and subject-specific content claims were developed through a detailed process following the approval of the policy claims and are described in separate documents that were adopted in June 2013 and revised in fall 2015. The PLDs for [ELA/literacy](#) and [mathematics](#) are available on the PARCC website.

Level 5

Students performing at this level **exceed academic expectations** for the knowledge, skills, and practices contained in the standards assessed at their grade level or course.

Policy Claims

For reporting results of assessments used to make College- and Career-Ready Determinations

- Students performing at this level **exceed academic expectations** for the knowledge, skills, and practices contained in the English language arts/literacy standards assessed at grade 11. They are very likely to engage successfully in entry-level, credit-bearing courses in College English Composition, Literature, and technical courses requiring college-level reading and writing. Students performing at this level are exempt from having to take and pass placement tests in two- and four-year public institutions of higher education designed to determine whether they are academically prepared for such courses without need for remediation.
- Students performing at this level **exceed academic expectations** for the knowledge, skills, and practices contained in the mathematics standards assessed at Algebra II or Mathematics III. They are very likely to engage successfully in entry-level, credit-bearing courses in College Algebra, Introductory College Statistics, and technical courses requiring an equivalent level of mathematics. Students performing at this level are exempt from having to take and pass placement tests in two- and four-year public institutions of higher education designed to determine whether they are academically prepared for such courses without need for remediation.

For reporting results of grades 3-10 ELA/Literacy, Grades 3-8 Mathematics, Algebra I, Geometry, Integrated Math I and II assessments

- Students performing at this level **exceed academic expectations** for the knowledge, skills, and practices contained in the standards for English language arts/literacy or mathematics assessed at their grade level. They are **academically well prepared** to engage successfully in further studies in this content area.

Level 4

Students performing at this level **meet academic expectations** for the knowledge, skills, and practices contained in the standards assessed at their grade level or course.

Policy Claims

For reporting results of assessments used to make College- and Career-Ready Determinations

- Students performing at this level **meet academic expectations** for the knowledge, skills, and practices contained in the English language arts/literacy standards assessed at grade 11. They are very likely to engage successfully in entry-level, credit-bearing courses in College English Composition, Literature, and technical courses requiring college-level reading and writing. Students performing at this level are exempt from having to take and pass placement tests in two- and four-year public institutions of higher education designed to determine whether they are academically prepared for such courses without need for remediation.
- Students performing at this level **meet academic expectations** for the knowledge, skills, and practices contained in the mathematics standards assessed at Algebra II or Mathematics III. They are very likely to engage successfully in entry-level, credit-bearing courses in College Algebra, Introductory College Statistics, and technical courses requiring an equivalent level of mathematics. Students performing at this level are exempt from having to take and pass placement tests in two- and four-year public institutions of higher education designed to determine whether they are academically prepared for such courses without need for remediation.

For reporting results of grades 3-10 ELA/Literacy, Grades 3-8 Mathematics, Algebra I, Geometry, Integrated Math I and II assessments

- Students performing at this level **meet academic expectations** for the knowledge, skills, and practices contained in the standards for English language arts/literacy or Mathematics assessed at their grade level. They are **academically prepared** to engage successfully in further studies in this content area.

Level 3

Students performing at this level **approach academic expectations** for the knowledge, skills, and practices contained in the standards assessed at their grade level or course.

Policy Claims

For reporting results of assessments used to make College- and Career-Ready Determinations

- Students performing at this level **approach academic expectations** for the knowledge, skills, and practices contained in the English language arts/literacy standards assessed at grade 11. They are likely to engage successfully in entry-level, credit-bearing courses in College English Composition, Literature, and technical courses requiring college-level reading and writing. **Students performing at Level 3 are strongly encouraged to continue to take challenging high school coursework in English through graduation.** Postsecondary institutions are encouraged to use additional information about students performing at Level 3, such as course completion, course grades and scores on other assessments to determine whether to place them directly into entry level courses.
- Students performing at this level **approach academic expectations** for the knowledge, skills, and practices contained in the mathematics standards assessed at Algebra II or Mathematics III. They are likely to engage successfully in entry-level, credit-bearing courses in College Algebra, Introductory College Statistics, and technical courses requiring an equivalent level of mathematics. **Students performing at Level 3 are strongly encouraged to continue to take challenging high school coursework in mathematics through graduation.** Postsecondary institutions are encouraged to use additional information about students performing at Level 3, such as course completion, course grades and scores on other assessments to determine whether to place them directly into entry level courses.

For reporting results of grades 3-10 ELA/Literacy, Grades 3-8 Mathematics, Algebra I, Geometry, Integrated Math I and II assessments

- Students performing at this level **approach academic expectations** for the knowledge, skills, and practices contained in the standards for English language arts/literacy or Mathematics assessed at their grade level. They are likely prepared to engage successfully in further studies in this content area.

Level 2

Students performing at this level **partially meet academic expectations** for the knowledge, skills, and practices contained in the standards assessed at their grade level or course.

Policy Claims

For reporting results of assessments used to make College- and Career-Ready Determinations

- Students performing at this level **partially meet academic expectations** for the knowledge, skills, and practices contained in the English language arts/literacy standards assessed at grade 11. They will likely need academic support to be prepared to engage successfully in entry-level, credit-bearing courses in College English Composition, Literature, and technical courses requiring college-level reading and writing. Students performing at this level are not exempt from having to take and pass placement tests in two- and four-year public institutions of higher education designed to determine whether they are academically prepared for such courses without need for remediation.
- Students performing at this level **partially meet academic expectations** for the knowledge, skills, and practices contained in the mathematics standards assessed at Algebra II or Mathematics III. They will likely need academic support to be prepared to engage successfully in entry-level, credit-bearing courses in College Algebra, Introductory College Statistics, and technical courses requiring an equivalent level of mathematics. Students performing at this level are not exempt from having to take and pass placement tests in two- and four-year public institutions of higher education designed to determine whether they are academically prepared for such courses without need for remediation.

For reporting results of grades 3-10 ELA/Literacy, Grades 3-8 Mathematics, Algebra I, Geometry, Integrated Math I and II assessments

- Students performing at this level **partially meet academic expectations** for the knowledge, skills, and practices contained in the standards for English language arts/literacy or Mathematics assessed at their grade level. They will likely need academic support to engage successfully in further studies in this content area.

Level 1

Students performing at this level **do not yet meet academic expectations** for the knowledge, skills, and practices contained in the standards assessed at their grade level or course.

Policy Claims

For reporting results of assessments used to make College- and Career-Ready Determinations

- Students performing at this level **do not yet meet academic expectations** for the knowledge, skills, and practices contained in the English language arts/literacy standards assessed at grade 11. They will need academic support to be prepared to engage successfully in entry-level, credit-bearing courses in College English Composition, Literature, and technical courses requiring college-level reading and writing. Students performing at this level are not exempt from having to take and pass placement tests in two- and four-year public institutions of higher education designed to determine whether they are academically prepared for such courses without need for remediation.
- Students performing at this level **do not yet meet academic expectations** for the knowledge, skills, and practices contained in the mathematics standards assessed at Algebra II or Mathematics III. They will need academic support to be prepared to engage successfully in entry-level, credit-bearing courses in College Algebra, Introductory College Statistics, and technical courses requiring an equivalent level of mathematics. Students performing at this level are not exempt from having to take and pass placement tests in two- and four-year public institutions of higher education designed to determine whether they are academically prepared for such courses without need for remediation.

For reporting results of grades 3-10 ELA/Literacy, Grades 3-8 Mathematics, Algebra I, Geometry, Integrated Math I and II assessments

- Students performing at this level **do not yet meet academic expectations** for the knowledge, skills, and practices contained in the standards for English language arts/literacy or Mathematics assessed at their grade level. They will need academic support to engage successfully in further studies in this content area.