

The Honorable Tim Griffin and  
Members of the Governor's Council on Common Core Review  
Office of the Arkansas Lieutenant Governor  
State Capitol, Suite 270  
Little Rock, AR 72201-1061

Governor Griffin and Council members,

Thank you again for inviting me to provide testimony about the value of PARCC for Arkansas students. The PARCC states are focused on one thing: providing the highest quality assessments in English Language Arts/Literacy and Mathematics to support student success. Arkansas has been a strong leader in the development and administration of PARCC and helped make it an excellent assessment, second to none in my view.

I am providing a copy of my written testimony from last week and some additional materials to support your work. Below, I have provided some specific responses to a few issues that were raised during the session.

**Reasons to Continue Administering PARCC** - I want to emphasize that the number one reason to continue with PARCC assessments is the quality of the assessment and its alignment to Arkansas' academic standards. Arkansas and other states in the consortium, including Massachusetts and Maryland, made quality of the assessment items and performance tasks priority number one. The quality of the assessment allows Arkansas to return meaningful and actionable information for teachers and parents to support each student's success. Comparability and cost savings are important, but quality is the most important.

We acknowledge that the administration of the assessment can be improved, but underscore that overall the first administration has gone well, and districts, schools and students are becoming more familiar with the PARCC assessment system. Changing assessments would not solve for any technical issues, as most if not all assessments are moving to computer administration and will present the same kind of learning curve issues.

**Foreseeing Technical Issues** - I want to assure you that all of the PARCC states are focused on ensuring students are able to engage and complete the highest quality assessment possible. While everything has not been perfect, it is still notable that 5 million students including over 300,000 in Arkansas have been able to successfully complete the assessment.

One of the hallmarks of the PARCC consortium is that it is led by states, not by a vendor, so changes to the program can be made quickly. As an example, PARCC states participated in a large-scale field test last spring (2014) (1 million students) which exposed some issues that needed addressing – and which were addressed prior to this year's administration. I am providing you a copy of the "Lessons Learned" report that details what we learned and how we addressed them.

This year, Arkansas and other states worked to prepare districts and schools for computerized administration of the test. As with any new system, there were first time issues, but the good news is that districts and schools are becoming more familiar with the platform and have ironed out many first time difficulties based on the number of reported issues from the Performance Based Assessment section to the End of Year section.

The PARCC state chiefs are working to respond to the feedback from districts, schools, teachers, parents and students to improve the administration of the assessment and continue to provide better information to teachers and parents to support each student. Just yesterday, May 20<sup>th</sup>, the PARCC state chiefs voted to shorten the test and combine testing windows to streamline administration. These changes will be applied immediately to next year's administration. This is another example of how states lead this program and are listening to district and school leaders, as well as parents and students.

**PARCC Cost Structure** – While there are many options states can choose individually that affect per student pricing in their state, the fixed base price for online testing this year is \$23.97 per student. This includes the cost of both the math and ELA/literacy (i.e. reading and writing) online tests. Costs for paper and pencil testing and other services add to the per pupil cost for individual states, but sharing costs across larger numbers of students helps to reduce costs for participating states. This year, Arkansas's cost to administer PARCC is less than the cost of the previous state test (approximately \$3 million dollars less). There will be additional cost savings as more students engage with the assessment. At 7 million students testing, the fixed price for online testing drops to \$19.97 per pupil. Again, the price for students using paper and pencil tests will be somewhat higher.

**PARCC Items and Grade Level Appropriateness** - PARCC items are developed at each grade level to align to Arkansas academic standards for each grade. Items are carefully constructed to allow all students to show what they know and what they can do, and the assessments include items and tasks across a range of difficulty levels. The PARCC assessment, like Arkansas's high academic standards, work at each grade level to support student success with the goal of preparing all students to be college and career ready by graduation. Every test item is reviewed by at least 30 educators and state officials to ensure the items are aligned to the academic standards, measure grade-level content, and are fair and free from any bias.

**PARCC and Test Prep** – Test prep generally refers to classroom time devoted to drilling and practicing for standardized testing. This is commonly known as “drill and kill” and is not regarded as good instructional practice.

As opposed to previous state tests, PARCC does not rely on rote memorization or “test prep.” The PARCC states have worked thoughtfully to create an assessment that truly mirrors outstanding instruction and classroom assessment. Questions require students to read and analyze material and then provide responses and back up their work. This is how we measure and support critical thinking, problem solving and clear communications. **The best preparation for PARCC is excellent instruction aligned to the academic standards.**

With any assessment, especially a new one, there is a need to ensure students are familiar with how the assessment works and how questions and responses are completed. This kind of prep should be minimal and should not include repetitive test practice sessions.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide information about PARCC and Arkansas's participation in the consortium. Please let me know if I can provide any additional information or answer any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laura M. Slover". The signature is written in a cursive style with a clear, legible font.

Laura Slover