

Laura Slover Testimony – Arkansas Governor’s Council on Common Core Review

My name is Laura Slover. I am a former high school English teacher, a former community college instructor, the mother of a first grader, a longtime education policy analyst, and now the CEO of Parcc Inc., a non-profit organization working with 11 states and the District of Columbia to help develop and implement a modern assessment system for Arkansas and the other states.

Lt. Governor Griffin, members of the committee, thank you for inviting me here today to talk with you about Arkansas’s new aligned assessment.

1) I say *Arkansas’s assessment* because Arkansas has not purchased PARCC from an outside group.

Arkansas is part of the group of states that make up the PARCC consortium and has had a seat at the table from the start, directing the creation of an entirely new test that meets the needs of Arkansas students, parents and teachers. The involvement of Arkansas educators can be seen in all aspects of the test – educators like Helen Eaton, 4th Grade Teacher, Fayetteville Public Schools; Jennifer Brown, director of special education in the North Little Rock School District; Angela Donner, fifth grade teacher, Marion School District. And educators and experts from the Arkansas Department of Education – people like Hope Allen, Mike Hernandez, Tom Kimbrell and many others. Arkansas has shown leadership in many ways.

- A. Transparency. Arkansas leaders pushed for the public release of hundreds of test questions from the PARCC tests every year.
- B. Value of Higher Education. Southern Arkansas University just became one of the first institutions to become a “PARCC Pioneer,” meaning that soon a student’s score on high school PARCC tests could allow them to skip taking a placement test, bypass remedial courses in English and math and save them money by not having to take those classes. Other Arkansas institutions are expected to follow.
- C. Accommodations. Jared Hogue, formerly with the Arkansas School for Deaf and now with the Arkansas Department of Education, was instrumental in the development and implementation of accommodations for students who are deaf and hard of hearing.
- D. Educators. In your packets is a list of many more K-12 and higher education educators and department officials who have participated in the development and implementation of PARCC.

E. District Leadership. Just last week, I had the pleasure of participating in a meeting with Kelvin Gragg, district superintendent from Dumas, and Greg Murry, district superintendent from Conway, and a small group of school district superintendents from other PARCC states to get feedback and to share best practices to improve PARCC. It is nice to see you both again today.

2) In your packet is a document that describes the various roles in the consortium. The point of this is to underscore the level to which Arkansas is in charge of Arkansas's test.

- A. Arkansas is a member of the PARCC consortium governing board. The commissioners of education for this state have voted on every design and policy decision for the assessment Arkansas students are taking today. Every major decision about the test has been with a unanimous vote and always focused on putting students first.
- B. One important policy decision that Arkansas and the other states have made is that student data is the exclusive property of each individual member state. This is not the case with some other assessments.
- C. PARCC is a consortium of states. That means the states themselves are the deciders about every aspect of the test. Unlike other assessments you have heard about, PARCC is the only one in which the states have complete control.
- D. A note about Parcc Inc., which I lead: We are a nonprofit organization created to assist the states with the development of the assessments, to facilitate the work of educators in the PARCC states with test development, item review and professional development.

We are also charged with managing Pearson, the testing company responsible for the administration of the assessments in your states. Arkansas does not buy the test from us. Arkansas and other PARCC states direct us to help *you* build *your* test. We are *your* project manager.

- E. So, what do we mean when we say Arkansas is in charge? Arkansas is more in charge of the PARCC assessment than it would ever be by purchasing an off-the-shelf assessment like ACT, which owns its test items, owns the student data, and which does not have a policy-making board made up of the state education leaders.

3) Why PARCC? PARCC is a different kind of test – and a test with *purpose*. PARCC measures math, reading and writing, including writing and multi-step problems, at every grade level. This means that instead of simply measuring how well students recall facts and formulas, students must be thinkers and problem-solvers. This is what colleges and employers are looking for; it's what your educators have said that your children need to be successful.

The first administration of PARCC has gone well in Arkansas and in all of the PARCC states. Over 450,000 students across Arkansas and 5 million students in all of the PARCC states,

successfully completed the performance-based portion of the assessments and are now completing the end-of-year portion. This is not to say there were not issues or challenges – there were; but most of these were the kind of issues you see with the roll out of any new test.

We are seeing far fewer technical and customer service issues from districts and schools. Educators and administrators have ironed out most local issues and are more familiar with the platform. Our technical support team has worked with Pearson to provide and promote more detailed technical support instructions and materials. The assessment and platform are working well and the PARCC states stand out from many other states that experienced critical issues that either resulted in postponement or cancellation of some testing.

4) Arkansas and your fellow consortium states are making changes to improve the assessment for students, teachers and students. Your education department and the other members of the consortium have been listening to the feedback from students, parents, teachers and district administrators and are currently working on a number of changes to improve the assessment including:

a) Consolidating the assessment into a single test window.

b) Reducing overall testing time and better aligning test unit times to school class schedules and calendars.

As you can see, PARCC is very different from off-the-shelf tests. Arkansas and the other states are able to address feedback and concerns quickly and maintain quality without shouldering the cost individually. PARCC was developed specifically to evaluate the new academic standards adopted by Arkansas and to support students in reaching them.

5) Cost savings. What has been the overall cost so far to implement the test?

If I haven't convinced you with any of the other arguments, you should also consider cost and the value for that cost.

The initial cost of test development was covered by a grant. Implementing this year's test in Arkansas costs \$23.97 per student for online reading, writing and mathematics tests. Paper is slightly more expensive, but Arkansas is well ahead of many other states when it comes to technology in the classroom, with more than 90 percent of its students taking the test on technology, thus keeping costs down. This is less than the cost of the previous state test (approximately \$3 million dollars less).

Note: AR's PMSC contract = \$284,491

Thank you again for the opportunity to join you today and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.