

# The PARCC Difference:

## A Better Measure of What Students Should Know to Succeed at Each Grade Level



**THEN** In language arts, tests mainly asked for multiple-choice answers, so students did not do much writing to express ideas. Instead, they identified words without using them in context.

In math, students generally memorized procedures or formulas—but did not learn the reasons behind key mathematical concepts. Our tests generally asked students to memorize information, not explain it.

### English Language Arts/Literacy, Grade 5


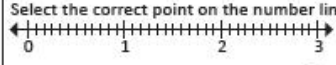
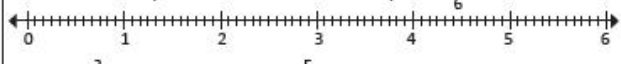
OLD TEST ITEM	PARCC TEST ITEM
<p>Which two words are synonyms for heap?</p> <p>A. pile B. row C. corner D. mound E. pattern</p>	<p><b>PART A</b> What is the meaning of the word <b>dictate</b> as it is used in paragraph 23*?</p> <p>a. Hint b. Fix c. Understand d. Decide</p> <p><b>PART B</b> Which phrase helps the reader understand the meaning of dictate?</p> <p>a. "...recreate the tree house..." b. "...determine the shape..." c. "...is less expensive to build..." d. "...has all the time in the world..."</p> <p><small>*Students will have a reading passage in front of them with numbered paragraphs to which they can refer.</small></p>
<b>WHAT'S DIFFERENT?</b>	
<p>Students must identify the meaning of words without context.</p>	<p>At first, this may look like the multiple choice questions of the past. But note that in Part A students have the advantage of the reading passage to gather meaning and, in Part B, students are asked to find words in the reading passage that back up their choice in Part A. PARCC focuses attention on vocabulary, particularly <i>academic language</i>, which is emphasized in the standards.</p>



**NOW** In language arts, students must read, analyze, and explain the meaning of what they read. PARCC measures writing at every grade, and helps students build vocabulary.

In math, PARCC asks students to "reason" in mathematical terms—to use math concepts to solve real-world problems, and show how they got the answer.

### Mathematics, Grade 4

OLD TEST ITEM	PARCC TEST ITEM
<p>Justine is using the stickers below to decorate a picture frame.</p>  <p>1. What fraction of Justine's stickers are hearts? Which of the number in your fraction represents the whole set of stickers?</p> <p>2. Draw and label a number line and mark an X on the number line to show the location of the fraction of Justine's stickers that are ladybugs.</p> <p><b>BE SURE TO LABEL YOUR RESPONSES 1 AND 2.</b></p>	<p>Ava and Mia are comparing the fractions <math>\frac{3}{2}</math> and <math>\frac{5}{6}</math>.</p> <p><b>PART A:</b> Ava created this number line to graph <math>\frac{3}{2}</math>.</p>  <p>Select the correct point on the number line to represent <math>\frac{3}{2}</math>.</p> <p>Mia created this number line to graph <math>\frac{5}{6}</math>.</p>  <p>Select the correct point on the number line to represent <math>\frac{5}{6}</math>.</p> <p><b>PART B:</b> Is <math>\frac{3}{2}</math> greater than or less than <math>\frac{5}{6}</math>? Explain how you know.</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 40px; width: 100%;"></div> <p><b>PART C:</b> Write a fraction that is between <math>\frac{3}{2}</math> and <math>\frac{5}{6}</math>.</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100%; text-align: center; padding: 5px;"><input type="text"/></div> <p>Explain how you know your fraction is between <math>\frac{3}{2}</math> and <math>\frac{5}{6}</math>.</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 40px; width: 100%;"></div>
<b>WHAT'S DIFFERENT?</b>	
<p>Notice the focus on procedure (counting, in this case). You can also see that students do not engage with the material.</p>	<p>The PARCC item is in several parts. Part A asks students to show they know that a fraction is a number, rather than just a ratio (like heart stickers to total number of stickers in the old test item). This puts the focus on understanding the concept. Students interact with the problem by placing fractions on the number line, an example of using technology to enhance the question.</p> <p>In Part B, students are asked to make sense of the fractions as numbers by comparing them — taking a step beyond just putting them on the number line.</p> <p>In Part C, students apply their understanding by creating a fraction that is between <math>\frac{3}{2}</math> and <math>\frac{5}{6}</math>. You can see that the tasks build upon one another and ask students to do more than just procedures. Students are asked to demonstrate understanding and apply and explain their knowledge.</p>



*"Parent engagement is the best resource for student success in school. Maryland PTA is proud to collaborate with the Maryland State Department of Education and others to help parents understand test results."*

— Elizabeth Ysla Leight, President, Maryland PTA