

Education Week

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National Landscape Fragments as States Plan Common-Core Testing

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Only a few years ago, the ambitious initiative to use shared assessments to gauge learning based on the new common-core standards had enlisted 45 states and the District of Columbia. Today, the testing landscape looks much more fragmented, with **only 27 of them still planning to use those tests in 2014-15, and the rest opting for other assessments or undecided**, an *Education Week* analysis shows.

For a variety of reasons, including the length and cost of the tests and political heat over the federal money supplied for their development, many states changed their minds about using the end-of-year accountability tests in English/language arts and math from the two state consortia that are leading the drive.

As of mid-May, 17 states planned to use the tests produced by the [Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium](#); just nine states plus the District of Columbia planned to use tests made by the [Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers](#), or PARCC.

Adding a level of complexity, seven states decided to split their assessment regimes, using one test designer for high school and another for lower grades.

Taken together, the shifts have produced a far less unified testing environment than existed even a year ago, when all but a half-dozen states still planned to use one of two assessments by Smarter Balanced or PARCC.

In sharp contrast, *Education Week's* analysis shows that **states' current plans for 2014-15 encompass the use of at least 19 different tests**.

A look at the membership of the two consortia suggests a more unified picture: Thirty-seven states and the District of Columbia still count themselves as members. But *Education Week* found that 11 of those, despite their membership, say they will use other tests. Six of the 11 have chosen assessments—largely sticking with their own state tests and adjusting for the new Common Core State Standards—while five are still weighing their options.

For this article, *Education Week* solicited assessment plans from all 50 states and the District of Columbia, and received responses from all but one state, Indiana. Drawing on those responses, along with Indiana's publicly reported plans and a variety of political maneuverings in the states, we produced a state-by-state profile for 2014-15.

Misbegotten Idea?

For those who had hoped that PARCC and Smarter Balanced would design better, more instructionally valuable assessments, it's worrisome to see states backing away from that enterprise.

James W. Pellegrino, a distinguished professor of education at the University of Illinois-Chicago who serves on the technical-advisory committees of both consortia, said the trend "moves us back closer to where we were under No Child Left Behind." That federal law, though it sought to spur student achievement, left each state free to set its definition of "proficient" as low as it liked, he noted.

With many different tests measuring students' learning, Mr. Pellegrino said, **the country loses the ability to reach a shared, rigorous definition of mastery or college readiness.**

Sizing Up States' Plans

Some states that fell into the "undecided" category have leadership that strongly supports the common core, but political turmoil has led them to delay or waver about deciding to use consortium tests.

New York, for instance, belongs to PARCC, but anti-common-core sentiment there has led the state to hang back on a commitment to use PARCC assessments in 2014-15.

"The Board of Regents has yet to decide on the utility of these exams for New York state students," state education department spokesman Tom Dunn wrote in an email to *Education Week*.

Massachusetts, whose commissioner of education is the chairman of the PARCC governing board, **is letting districts decide in 2014-15 whether to use PARCC or the state's current test, the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System**, or MCAS (though 10th grade students must still take the MCAS next year to graduate).

Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal, a Republican, appears strongly inclined to dump PARCC, and might well have the upper hand in doing so. The state House of Representatives has also passed a budget amendment barring use of consortium tests unless the state solicits other bids.

While winds could shift in PARCC's favor in Louisiana, for now *Education Week* deems its plans "undecided."

Michigan was in the Smarter Balanced category until early May, when both houses of its legislature approved language calling for a new version of its own test next year. ■

http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2014/05/21/32assessment_ep.h33.html?tkn=ZUWFNT58VZWeXb1bupZnOISEAEpt33lItAuL&print=1

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