

# Getting the Facts Straight about Education Data

## Common Core State Standards–Associated Assessment Consortia

High education expectations—and the tools to ensure that they are being met—empower educators, students, parents, and policymakers to support student learning and make the best decisions to improve education. Most states have voluntarily adopted the Common Core State Standards to serve as their education expectations. To consistently and transparently measure the skills and knowledge outlined in the standards, many states have opted to join one of two assessment consortia and use the Common Core–aligned assessments they develop. As states choose to participate in these consortia and implement the new assessments, it is important for everyone with a stake in education to understand how the consortia work, what data the assessments collect, and how student privacy is safeguarded. This document dispels the most common myths with concise talking points and related resources.

**MYTH: The assessment consortia are a federal data collection or require the collection of additional data for the federal government.**

**FACTS: There is no new federal data collection associated with the assessment consortia, and states using the consortia assessment tools do not have any different reporting requirements than nonparticipating states.**

- Two groups of states have formed assessment consortia: the [Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers \(PARCC\)](#) and the [Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium](#). Both are voluntary and open groups of states that have chosen to work together to create valid, reliable, and fair assessments of college and career readiness.
- Both consortia will implement the highest level of industry best practices for data security.
- There is no additional data submission required through the consortia assessments.
- States that have chosen to use the assessments developed by Smarter Balanced or PARCC are simply replacing their current state assessments with these new tests. There is nothing about the consortia or their assessments that changes federal reporting requirements in any way. States like Texas and Georgia that do not belong to the consortia have the same federal reporting requirement as those in Smarter Balanced and PARCC.
- PARCC and Smarter Balanced **will not** send any student-level data from the assessments to the federal government.
- The federal government **does not** have access to the student-level information housed in state data systems. State participation in the assessment consortia or use of the assessment tools does not change this lack of access in any way.
- States that receive grants from the federal government are **forbidden** to report any student-level data to the federal government in return (see the [Higher Education Opportunity Act](#), [No Child Left Behind](#), the [Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems grant program](#), and the [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act](#)).
- States make all decisions about how data are used or shared. Neither PARCC nor Smarter Balanced makes decisions as a group that affect state data.

**MYTH: The assessment consortia will not adequately protect student data and will allow data about students to be indiscriminately shared.**

**FACTS: While PARCC and Smarter Balanced are employing different approaches to the design and development of assessments, both are ensuring student privacy through policies and technology.**

-  Both PARCC and Smarter Balanced are implementing specific safeguards to protect student privacy.
-  The consortia will enter into written agreements with each member state regarding the collection and use of personally identifiable student information. These agreements prohibit the sale of student data for any purpose. Each state makes decisions about whether to share student-level data with third parties such as researchers.
-  The consortia will implement industry best practices to ensure that data are stored and transmitted securely. Any vendors that PARCC and Smarter Balanced work with to provide technology or assessment services are contractually required to protect all data by implementing industry-leading precautions for data security.

#### PARCC

-  PARCC's [privacy policy](#) describes how data security and student privacy will be ensured and limits how assessment data can be used. The policy is based on the principle that states own all student data including their test score data and control all access to it.
-  Mirroring current state practice, PARCC's contractors will send all information related to its assessments to

each individual state and **will not** store any information without the express permission of the state.

-  PARCC staff **do not** have access to student data at any level unless granted access by states for research and analysis.

#### Smarter Balanced

-  Smarter Balanced member states unanimously endorsed the [principle](#) that states retain control of all student-level data.
-  Each Smarter Balanced state will enter into a memorandum of understanding that will govern the use of its data including the collection and use of personally identifiable student information. The agreements will affirm state ownership and control of all student information collected in Smarter Balanced assessments.
-  Smarter Balanced collects and maintains a minimum amount of personally identifiable information on behalf of its member states as necessary for the operation of the assessment system.
-  Unless specifically directed by a member state, Smarter Balanced will not collect students' personally identifiable information.

**MYTH: Personal questions such as those about religion and family income will be part of the assessments.**

**FACTS: Only questions related to academic content and skills will be on the Smarter Balanced and PARCC assessments.**

-  The assessments include academic content only and do not require students to provide information on religion, family income, or other personal topics.
-  The student-level information collected through the PARCC or Smarter Balanced assessments is the same for states using the consortia assessments and for states using other assessment tools.
-  States are not required to provide Smarter Balanced with student name, date of birth, or student ID number. If a state provides this information so that

Smarter Balanced may manage student- and school-level reporting, the use of these data will be strictly controlled by a memorandum of understanding between the state and Smarter Balanced.

-  PARCC assessments collect student name, date of birth, and student ID (not Social Security number) to ensure accurate matching of the assessment components and to facilitate state use of the assessment data for generating student-level reports for families and educators.



The Data Quality Campaign (DQC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, national advocacy organization committed to realizing an education system in which all stakeholders—from parents to policymakers—are empowered with high quality data from early childhood, K-12, postsecondary, and workforce systems. To achieve this vision, DQC supports policymakers and other key leaders to promote effective data use to ensure students graduate from high school prepared for success in college and the workplace. For more information, visit [www.dataqualitycampaign.org](http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org).