MARYLAND STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Preparing World-Class Students

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TO: Members of the State Board of Education

FROM: Lillian M. Lowery, Ed.D.

DATE: September 25, 2012

SUBJECT: PARCC Update: College and Career Readiness

PURPOSE:

To provide an update concerning the status of the discussions between PARCC K-12 and Higher Education educators regarding college- and career-readiness determination, including performance-level descriptors and validation criteria.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

PARCC is committed to the development of a set of summative assessments aligned to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in English Language Arts/literacy (ELA) and mathematics. PARCC summative assessments will be administered at the end of the year. ELA and mathematics end of grade assessments will be administered in grades 3 through 8. End of course assessments will also be administered. ELA tests will be given for English 9, English 10, and English 11; mathematics end of course assessments will be administered for Algebra 1, Algebra 2, and Geometry. Descriptors of performance on each test will be developed and used to establish five levels of performance. The higher education and K12 communities will select the level of performance on the high school assessment which signifies readiness for success in selected entry-level, credit-bearing courses in English/literacy and mathematics. Performance standards will be set for elementary and middle school tests so as to support a trajectory of success towards college and career readiness. During scoring, each student's score will be compared to the cut scores which differentiate among performance levels, and the student will be assigned to the appropriate level. Decisions about the specific high school courses in English Language Arts and Mathematics to which the college and career readiness standard will apply and acceptable evidence of validity will reflect input from both communities.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Two major themes have guided the work of PARCC. First, assessments are being designed to address comprehensively the Common Core State Standards in English/Language Arts and Mathematics and to measure students reliably across a wide range of proficiency. Second, the assessments are intended to allow for tracking student growth and development in each discipline from grades 3 through 8 and predicting readiness for success in entry-level post-

secondary credit-bearing courses based upon performance on selected high school courses. Higher education and K12 educators are collaborating to define the performance characteristics associated with "readiness" and to determine which high school courses should inform the readiness determination.

Several proposals for the alignment of high school performance and college readiness standards are being considered. First, It has been proposed that students who achieve a performance level of 4 (out of 5 levels) on designated high school tests be regarded as prepared for selected entry-level credit-bearing college courses and permitted to enroll directly and without remediation. Achievement of a Level 4 score requires the student to demonstrate a "solid command of the knowledge and skills embodied by the Common Core State Standards."

Second, it has been proposed that a student who earns a Level 4 on the English 11 test be designated as ready for success in an entry level credit-bearing course such as College English Composition or Literature or in another introductory course that requires college-level reading. Because the three mathematics courses each address different domains of mathematics skill and knowledge, all of which are important to success in college-level mathematics courses, discussion regarding which courses should be used to determine readiness continues.

Third, a validation process requiring a determination of the accuracy with which performance on the high school tests predicts grade earned in the corresponding college-level course is under discussion, and a criterion for prediction accuracy has been proposed.

Maryland K12 and higher education leaders have invited educators in the state to complete an online survey developed by PARCC to secure input on the number and language of the performance level descriptors, a suggested validation criterion, the high school courses which should contribute to a readiness determination, and the entry-level college courses to which the readiness designation should apply. There has been general consensus around the performance levels and their wording and the applicability of the ELA readiness designation to college courses in English Composition, literature, or other courses requiring college-level reading. There has been less agreement about the validity criterion and the appropriate college-level mathematics courses to which the readiness designation should apply. Further discussions will engage Maryland educators on these issues and achieve consensus around these key decisions.

ACTION:

For information and discussion only.