

## **Statement and Letter to Parents from Commissioner Johnny Key**

Upon review of the communication regarding the release of scores from the PARCC assessment, it is apparent that we used language that left a misleading impression that Arkansas was backing away from high standards. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, the action taken by the State Board of Education on Thursday was adoption of the cut scores for the high school level assessments as recommended by the PARCC states.

Any assertion that Arkansas has adopted Level 3 as demonstrating proficiency is inaccurate. We fully embrace the higher level of expectations reflected in our standards and our assessment system, as these are critical components of advancing our K-12 education along the path to excellence.

Our description of Level 3 and above as reflecting students being "on track for college and career readiness" was in error. We should have then, as we will from this point forward, used the actual descriptions from PARCC to accurately reflect the performance of students at Level 3 as approaching academic expectations for college and career readiness.

To assist parents in understanding the PARCC results, we have prepared the letter below that explains the levels and what they mean for students. It is our hope that this information will generate robust conversations between parents and educators.

Dear Parent or Guardian,

I want to thank you for your ongoing dedication and encouragement to your child's success toward achieving college and career readiness. I appreciate you for taking the time to understand more about your child's education and the tests your child takes during school. It is essential to your child's success at school and in life that you thoroughly understand the areas in which your child is excelling and areas that may need improvement.

Last school year, your child participated in the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) test.

Your child tested in two main categories: Math and English Language Arts. The PARCC test replaced the Arkansas Benchmark and End-of-Course assessments that were given in previous years.

While only statewide test scores were released last week, you will soon receive your child's Individual Student Report. To help you better understand your child's scores, I want to provide some additional information about the results. Your child will receive a level of performance that ranges from 1 to 5 for Math and English Language Arts. The table below gives a brief description of each level of performance.

Students who score at Level 4 met grade level expectations, and those who score at Level 5 exceeded expectations. These students are likely to be prepared for success in college and careers.

Students who score at Level 3 are approaching college and career academic expectations for the knowledge and skills tested at the grade level; however, they will need support to reach Level 4 or 5. These students need improvement to attain college and career readiness. With your continued support, as well as assistance from teachers, students can be successful.

Students who score at Levels 1 and 2 will need interventions from parents and teachers to reach college and career readiness. If your child scores at this level, please contact your child's school to assist in the development of an Academic Improvement Plan (AIP).

I also want to encourage you to visit the Understand the Score website at [www.understandthescore.org](http://www.understandthescore.org). This site provides additional information about the PARCC results and what they mean for your child. I think you will find the video *Understanding the Score Report* on the website very helpful. To learn more about statewide results, go to <http://www.arkansased.gov/divisions/learning-services/student-assessment/test-scores/year?y=2015>.

As a state, we are committed to high expectations for our students. Regardless of the testing system used, we want to keep you informed and to work daily to improve the performance and college and career readiness of our students.

Table 1. PARCC Performance Level Descriptions

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|---------|---|
| Level 1 | The student performance demonstrated at this level did not yet meet academic expectations for the knowledge, skills, and practices embodied by the standards assessed at their grade level or course. |
| Level 2 | The student performance demonstrated at this level partially met academic expectations for the knowledge, skills, and practices embodied by the standards assessed at their grade level or course.    |
| Level 3 | The student performance demonstrated at this level approached academic expectations for the knowledge, skills, and practices embodied by the standards assessed at their grade level or course.       |
| Level 4 | The student performance demonstrated at this level met academic expectations for the knowledge, skills, and practices embodied by the standards assessed at their grade level or course.              |
| Level 5 | The student performance demonstrated at this level exceeded academic expectations for the knowledge, skills, and practices embodied by the standards assessed at their grade level or course.         |

Please know that we are committed to helping your child achieve college and career readiness. If we can be of assistance, please contact us at (501) 682-4558.

With warmest regards,

Johnny Key Commissioner of Education