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**Superintendent**

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**March 6, 2013**

**Parents/Guardians,**

In past years, students in grades 3 – 8 and 11 were administered a series of Pennsylvania State System of Assessment exams in the areas of reading, math, writing and science. The scores from these assessments comprise each student's proficiency and each school's Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) based on standards set forth by the state. This year, two forms of assessments, the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) and the Keystone Exams will be taking place throughout Pennsylvania during a specific timeframe. It is the expectation of the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) that all students take the assessments, so attendance is vital. If students miss school on one of the dates of testing, every effort will be made to provide the opportunity for testing make-up.

In preparation for the PSSA/Keystone Exam, your child has completed coursework that is aligned to state standards. Your child will be assessed on Pennsylvania's Academic Standards to determine their level of proficiency on a scale that rates students' competency from Below Basic, Basic, Proficient and Advanced. The Pennsylvania Department of Education will release the results in the summer and you will receive a copy of your child's academic results in the fall. Note the following testing dates:

**2013 PSSA Assessments (Elementary and Middle School)**

March 11 – 15	PSSA Writing Assessment	Grades 5 and 8
April 8 – 19	PSSA Reading and Mathematics Assessment	Grades 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
April 22 – 26	PSSA Science Assessment	Grades 4 and 8

**2013 Keystone Exam (Secondary Level)**

The Keystone Exams will be administered to students who have taken the specified course during the current year or those juniors who took the exam during the first semester, but have not met proficiency on the exam. Each exam consists of two modules that address content standards. A student's performance on the Keystone Exam will be a contributing factor in future course placement.

May 13 – 14	Keystone Exam Literature
May 15 – 16	Keystone Exam Algebra I
May 17	Keystone Exam Biology

**To ensure your child will be prepared to perform well on the assessment, we recommend:**

- Students should get a good night of sleep and be well-rested.
- Students eat a healthy breakfast prior to taking the assessment.

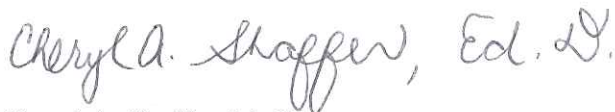
**Here are a few tips we recommend that you discuss with your child about the assessment:**

- Listen to, read and follow all directions given. Ask questions if you do not understand the directions.
- Read each question carefully, especially multiple-choice items that ask for the “best answer.”
- Be sure to read any open-ended questions and writing prompts carefully before responding.
- Try to answer each test item.
- **DO NOT bring any electronic devices, (e.g., cell phones, smart phones, Kindles, iPods, etc.)**

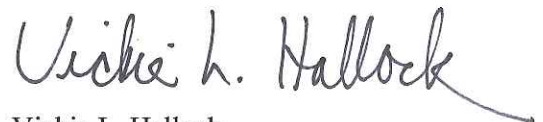
**New this year: Cell phones and other electronic devices** - The Pennsylvania Department of Education has clearly indicated that schools and students must ensure the integrity of the PSSA/Keystone Exam administration. Therefore, we strongly recommend that students do not bring electronic devices with them to school during the testing window. At the building level, measures will be put into place to ensure that tests will not be compromised in accordance with the state’s requirements. Please be advised that disciplinary measures will be strongly enforced by the school, if an electronic device violation occurs.

Parents of students in Grades 3 through 8 should carefully read the attachment, Information for Parents/Guardians that addresses frequently asked questions about the Pennsylvania’s System of School Assessments. Should you have questions regarding the PSSA Assessments or the Keystone Exams, please contact your school administrator, who will provide further information for you.

Your child’s success in their academic experience is a collaborative effort that involves teachers, parents, and students. Please encourage your child to do his/her best on each portion of the assessment. Thank you for your continued support to promote your child’s academic growth.



Cheryl A. Shaffer, Ed. D.  
Assistant Superintendent



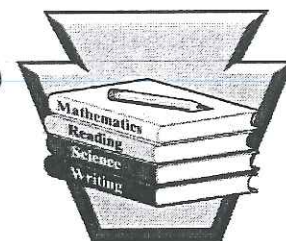
Vickie L. Hallock  
Director of Elementary Education



## Frequently Asked Questions

# Information for Parents or Guardians Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA)

Writing Assessment, March 11–15, 2013  
Reading & Mathematics Assessment, April 8–19, 2013  
Science Assessment, April 22–26, 2013



## GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE PSSA

### Which schools participate?

All school districts and charter schools participate in the assessments. Nonpublic schools may also participate on a voluntary basis.

### Which students take the assessments?

Except for a very few students who meet specific criteria for participation in an alternate assessment, all students are included in the assessments as outlined below:

Reading & Mathematics – Grades 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8

Writing – Grades 5 and 8

Science – Grades 4 and 8

### Who decided what the assessment should measure?

Groups of educators from all levels of education in Pennsylvania chose the areas of knowledge upon which the assessment is based. The groups included teachers, supervisors, curriculum directors, and college specialists. They also reviewed, edited, and approved the test items.

### Who administers the assessment?

Each school chooses the person(s) who will administer the assessment. In most cases, these are the students' teachers, who are often helped by the principal or a guidance counselor.

### How are the results reported?

Two copies of the individual student report for all assessments will be sent to the school districts and charter schools for distribution to parents, teachers, guidance counselors, and/or principals. The state will not receive any report with individual names included.

School-level reports will be used for curricular and planning purposes. School districts and charter schools may publish the results of PSSA testing for each school. The state will also release school-by-school assessment data.

### May parents see the assessments?

Parents and guardians may review the assessments by making arrangements with the School Assessment Coordinator once the assessments arrive at the school. Confidentiality agreements must be signed, and no copies of the assessments or notes about assessment items will be permitted to leave the school.

If after reviewing the test parents/guardians find the test to be in conflict with their religious belief and wish their student(s) to be excused from the test, the parents/guardians must provide a written request that states the objection to the Superintendent or Chief Academic Officer.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE READING & MATHEMATICS ASSESSMENTS (grades 3–8)

### How long do the assessments take?

The entire reading and mathematics assessments take approximately six to seven hours to complete. Your school district should inform you about the assessment schedule.

### What do the assessments include?

Each student completes three sections of questions for each of the reading and mathematics assessments. Some portions will be the same for all students, and some will consist of different groups of questions.

### What types of questions are on the assessments?

Students respond to two types of questions: multiple-choice and open-ended. In a multiple-choice question, the correct answer is chosen from four options, while open-ended questions require students to compose their responses.

In addition to these types of questions, students in grades 3–5 respond to reading selected-response questions and students in grades 4–5 respond to passage-based essays. Selected-response questions have two parts, and students select one or more answers for each part. For the passage-based essay, students analyze a text and use evidence from the passage to compose an essay.

### How are written responses to open-ended items scored?

The written responses for reading and mathematics open-ended items are scored by evaluators trained in applying a pre-determined scoring system. In mathematics and reading, scores are based on content only. Spelling and punctuation are not included as part of the scoring process.

### What is assessed in reading?

The reading assessment addresses two major reporting categories that encompass the reading process. Students read a number of passages from both fictional and nonfictional genres and respond to questions about these passages. By answering these questions, students indicate both their comprehension and reading skills and their analysis and interpretation of fictional and nonfictional text.

### What is assessed in mathematics?

The mathematics assessment addresses five major reporting categories. The proportion of items in each reporting category varies by grade level. As a part of the assessment of Reporting Category A, Numbers and Operations, students respond to a section of items in which a calculator is not permitted. Open-ended items require the students to show all of their work (calculations, graphs, drawings, etc.) and to explain in writing how they solved the problems.

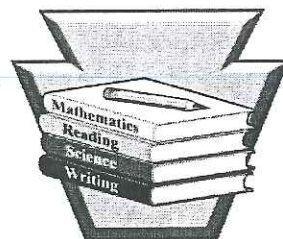


## Frequently Asked Questions

# Information for Parents or Guardians

## Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA)

Writing Assessment, March 11–15, 2013  
Reading & Mathematics Assessment, April 8–19, 2013  
Science Assessment, April 22–26, 2013



### INFORMATION ABOUT THE WRITING ASSESSMENT (grades 5 and 8)

#### How long does the assessment take?

The entire writing assessment takes approximately three to six hours to complete. Your school district should inform you about the assessment schedule.

#### What does the assessment include?

The writing assessment consists of twenty multiple-choice revising and editing questions and two writing prompts for grade 5 or three writing prompts for grade 8. Some portions of the assessment will be the same for all students, and some will consist of different groups of questions or writing prompts. All questions and writing prompts were written to align with Pennsylvania's Academic Standards for Writing.

#### What types of questions are on the assessments?

Students respond to two types of questions: multiple-choice and writing prompts. In a multiple-choice question, the correct answer is chosen from the four presented options, while writing prompts require students to compose their responses.

#### How are the written responses evaluated?

Trained evaluators score the student's response for composition (focus, content development, organization, and style) using approved scoring guidelines. Additionally, a second set of evaluators score the student's response for conventions (sentence formation, grammar, usage, spelling, and punctuation). Composition and conventions scores are combined to indicate the student's level of proficiency.

#### What is assessed in writing?

The writing assessment provides a direct performance measure of students' abilities to develop, organize, and express their ideas in a variety of writing situations. The writing assessment is intended to evaluate performances of individual students, to provide data about the school's writing program, and to serve as a check of the school's local assessment of writing.

### INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCIENCE ASSESSMENT (grades 4 and 8)

#### How long does the assessment take?

The entire science assessment takes approximately two to four hours to complete. Your school district should inform you about the assessment schedule.

#### What does the assessment include?

Students in grades 4 and 8 complete two sections of questions for the science assessment. Some portions will be the same for all students, and some will consist of different groups of questions.

#### What types of questions are on the assessment?

Students respond to two types of questions: multiple-choice and open-ended. In a multiple-choice question, the correct answer is chosen from the four presented options, while open-ended questions require students to compose their responses. At grade 8, the science assessment also includes science scenarios.

#### What is a science scenario?

A science scenario contains text, graphics, charts, and/or tables, and uses these elements to describe the results of a class project, an experiment, or other similar research. Students use the information found in a science scenario to answer multiple-choice questions.

#### How are the written responses to open-ended items scored?

The written responses for science open-ended items are scored by evaluators trained in applying a pre-determined scoring system. In science, scores are based on content only. Spelling and punctuation are not included as part of the scoring process.

#### What is assessed in science?

The science assessment addresses the four major reporting categories: The Nature of Science, Biological Sciences, Physical Sciences, and Earth and Space Sciences. The proportion of items devoted to each reporting category varies within a grade level. Each reporting category includes certain Assessment Anchors and Eligible Content.