

Frequently
Asked
Questions

Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA)
**Reading and
Mathematics Assessment**
Grades 3 - 8 and 11— March 2007
Information for Parents or Guardians



What is the PSSA designed to do?

The PSSA is designed to provide information about the quality of schools to parents, school districts, and the general public.

Who is participating in the assessment?

Students in grades 3 - 8 and 11 in all 501 school districts will take the reading and mathematics assessments. Since the assessments are designed to help determine the quality of the school programs, all students are to be included in the assessments, except for a few students who meet specific criteria. Nonpublic and private schools may participate on a voluntary basis.

How long are the assessments and when will they occur?

The reading and mathematics assessments will take approximately six hours. The assessments will be scheduled by the school district to take place during the testing window of March 12 through March 23, 2007. Your school district should inform you about the assessment schedule.

What will the assessments include?

Each student will answer three sets of items for each of the reading and mathematics assessments. Examples of the types of items that appear in the assessment are provided in Item Scoring Samplers available on PDE's website at: www.pde.state.pa.us. The samplers contain multiple-choice questions, open-ended questions, scoring guidelines, and sample responses.

What will be assessed in reading?

The reading assessment addresses two elements of the reading process. Students will indicate (1) comprehension and reading skills and (2) analysis and interpretation of fictional and nonfictional text by answering multiple-choice questions where the correct answer is chosen from four presented options, and by answering open-ended questions that require students to write their responses.

What will be assessed in mathematics?

Through the use of both multiple-choice items and open-ended items, the mathematics assessment addresses the five major Reporting Categories. The proportion of items devoted to each Reporting Category varies by grade level. In addition, as a part of the assessment of Reporting Category A, Numbers and Operations, students will respond to a special section of items in which the use of a calculator is not permitted. The open-ended performance tasks require the students to show all of their mathematical work (calculations, graphs, drawings, etc.) and to explain in writing how they solved the problems.

Who decided what the assessments should measure?

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

Who will administer the assessments?

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

How will the written responses be scored?

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

How will the results be reported?

Reports for reading and mathematics will be sent to the school districts for distribution to parents, teachers, and guidance counselors and/or principals. The state will not receive any reports with individual names included.

Results will be reported by school for curricular and planning purposes. School districts will publish the PSSA testing results for each school. The state will also release school-by-school assessment data.

Can parents (guardians) see the assessments?

Once the assessments arrive at the school, parents (guardians) may review the assessments by making arrangements with the school assessment coordinator. Confidentiality agreements must be signed, and no copies of the assessments or notes about items will be permitted to leave the school. If, after reviewing the assessments, parents do not want their child to participate in the mathematics or reading assessments due to a conflict with their religious beliefs, they may write to the school district superintendent prior to the beginning of the assessments to excuse their child from the assessments.