

Testing fact sheet

The Pennsylvania state test (PSSA)

Tests given

Students in the Pittsburgh School District take a variety of tests:

- ❖ Tests created by their teachers or by the District (“local assessments”)
- ❖ Tests that students in other parts of the country also take (standardized tests)
- ❖ The Pennsylvania System of School Assessment, or PSSA, tests (state-mandated tests)

Students take the PSSA in:

Subject	Grades tested
Reading & Math	3, 5, 8, 11
Writing	6, 9, 11

The state is developing tests in reading and math at other grade levels, and tests in science.

Students’ PSSA test scores are now used to rate each school’s “Adequate Yearly Progress.”



Test scores

Your child's scores on the PSSA will be rated:

- ❖ "Advanced" (above grade level)
- ❖ "Proficient" (satisfactory)
- ❖ "Basic" (the student answered some questions correctly but not enough to be considered satisfactory)
- ❖ "Below Basic" (the student showed little or no understanding of the questions or didn't try to answer them)

Students' PSSA test scores don't affect their report card grades or determine whether or not they are promoted to the next grade level. Scores are mailed to students' homes. Although scores are usually not available until several months after testing, a teacher should be able to tell you at any time how well your child is learning.

Your rights as a parent/guardian

You may:

- ❖ Request to see the test before your child takes it
- ❖ Refuse to allow your child to be tested if you object to the test based on your religious beliefs
- ❖ Review sample questions and answers from PSSA tests that have been used in the past

Note: To review the test before your child takes it, you must sign a confidentiality agreement. To refuse to allow your child to be tested, you must first review the test and then write a statement about its conflict with your religious beliefs. To see sample questions and answers, call the District's Assessment Office, at 412.338.8047; or go to the state Department of Education's website at www.pde.state.pa.us, click on K-12 Schools, then Assessment and Testing, then "Assessment Handbooks." Sample test questions are called "Released Items."



What is tested?

Reading. Students read a mix of fiction and nonfiction pieces (included in the test). They answer both multiple-choice questions and questions that ask them to write out an answer (called “open-ended” questions).

Math. Students answer both multiple-choice and open-ended questions. Most of the multiple choice questions require them to figure out the answer, not just remember facts they have memorized. Students are allowed to use a calculator to answer some questions.

Writing. Students read “prompts”—sentences that ask them to write about a specific topic—and write a response. Depending on the grade level, the prompts ask students to share information, to tell a story about something that really happened or that may happen, or to persuade the reader to take action or to adopt a point of view.

Your child's needs

To meet his/her needs, *any* student may be allowed to take the PSSA under slightly different conditions (called “accommodations”), as long as the conditions are approved by the state. Examples of approved changes include taking a test in a small group or in a separate room. To see a complete list, go to the state Department of Education website at www.pde.state.pa.us, click on K-12 Schools, then Assessment and Testing, then Testing Accommodations, then “Fact Sheet: Accommodations for All Students.”

To request an accommodation for your child, ask your child's teacher, the principal, or the school's “assessment coordinator” (a staff member assigned to help with the testing process). Your child may be given a test in one subject with accommodations and a test in another subject without accommodations.

For more information, and for help if your child suffers from “test anxiety” (anxiety about testing that affects his/her performance on the test), contact the District's Assessment Office, at 412.338.8047.

Children receiving special education services

Some students who receive special education services take an alternate test, called the Pennsylvania Alternate System of Assessment (PASA). Decisions about whether or not a student is eligible to take this test are made by the student's IEP (Individual Education Plan) team, which includes parents. Because of a change in federal law, all other students with disabilities take the PSSA tests at the grade level appropriate for their ages, regardless of the instructional goals outlined in their IEPs.

Fact sheets and guidelines about accommodations for children receiving special education services are posted on the state Department of Education website listed above, under “Your child's needs.” For more information, contact the District's Program for Students with Exceptionalities, at 412.323.3950; the Pittsburgh office of the Education Law Center, at 412.391.5225; or the Local Task Force on the Right to Education (a parents' group), at 412.995.5000, ext. 486.

English Language Learners (ELL)

“No Child Left Behind” has new testing requirements for English Language Learners (students whose first language is not English and who are not fluent in English).

Tests given	Which ELL students must take them (at tested grade levels)
Reading	Students enrolled in a U.S. school MORE than 1 year
Math	All students
Writing	All students
English Language Proficiency	All students

Note: The English Language Proficiency test is not a PSSA test, but it is required by “No Child Left Behind.”

PSSA tests may be given to your child in a different way (“accommodations”). For example:

- ❖ The ELL teacher may give your child the test.
- ❖ Your child may be tested in a small group, in a familiar classroom.
- ❖ Your child may be allowed to use an approved dictionary.

These accommodations may continue after your child leaves the ELL program.

Fact sheets and guidelines about accommodations for English Language Learners are posted on the state Department of Education website listed on the previous page, under “Your child’s needs.” For more information, contact the District’s English as a Second Language Program, at 412.338.8130.

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