



March 13, 2017

***Spring 2017 Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA)***

<b>English/Language Arts (ELA) Assessment for</b>	<b>Grades 3 through 8</b>	<i>April 3-7, 2017</i>
<b>Math Assessment for</b>	<b>Grades 3 through 8</b>	<i>April 24-28, 2017</i>
<b>Science Assessment for</b>	<b>Grades 4 and 8</b>	<i>May 1-5, 2017</i>

Dear Families of Students in Grades 3-8:

The Pennsylvania Department of Education has established windows during which the PSSA testing will occur. These assessments are administered in all 500 public school districts in Pennsylvania and with the exception of a very few students who meet specific criteria for participation in an alternate assessment, all district students are expected to participate in the state assessments as shown above.

All assessment items are written to align with Pennsylvania's Academic Standards for the specific subject being assessed. The results of each assessment provide valuable data to the school district, which are used for program planning and improvement purposes. Each assessment is made up of multiple-choice, selected response, and constructed response items. For more information about the different types of items on the ELA, Math, and Science PSSAs, please see the attached Parent/Guardian FAQ document provided by the State.

Individual student reports for all assessments will be sent to the school district early in the fall for distribution. As soon as individual student results are received, a copy will be provided to parents.

On the reverse side of this letter you will find some important information regarding electronic devices as well as the State's Code of Conduct for Test Takers – please review this information with your child prior to the first testing window. Also, we have provided you with a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document prepared by the PA Department of Education that provides more detailed PSSA-related information. If you have any additional questions about the purpose, contents, or assessment process related to the PSSA testing that will occur in April and May, please contact your child's principal.

Sincerely,

Michael J. Bromirski  
Assistant Superintendent

## **Use of Electronic Devices During PSSA or Keystone Exam Testing**

In an era of cell phones, smartphones, and other electronic devices which can easily photograph and instantly share photographs, confidential, and secure test materials can be easily compromised. The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) has requested that districts make clear to students and families that the material contained in the PSSA and Keystone Exams is copyrighted property of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Copying or duplicating the material from an assessment, including the taking of a photograph of secure assessment material, is a violation of the federal Copyright Act. Penalties for violations of the Copyright Act may include the cost of replacing the compromised test item(s) or fines of no less than \$750 up to \$30,000 for a single violation (17 U.S.C. § 101 *et seq.*).

In order to ensure reliable test results and to avoid the cost of replacing test items, the PDE requires schools to set rules and take certain steps to protect test materials. Electronic devices such as but not limited to cell phones, smartphones, smartwatches, E-readers, Nooks, Kindles, iPods, tablets, camera-ready devices, and any other electronic device which can be used to photograph or duplicate test materials, access the internet and/or communicate with others during the administration of the PSSA or Keystone Exams are not permitted in any testing site. ***Please speak with and remind your child that the possession and/or use of a cell phone or any other electronic device during the administration of the PSSA or Keystone Exams is strictly prohibited and will result in the assignment of consequences at both the school and State levels.***

Test administrators follow protocols in the testing rooms to do everything possible to make sure students are not in possession of devices that could be used to capture or record content from the state assessment. If a student is discovered using and/or having a cell phone or other electronic device in his or her possession during the testing, the school will contact the parent/guardian. Students will be subjected to school disciplinary consequences that could include suspension. Additionally, per the requirements of the PDE, the student's test will not be scored and the student will be required to retake the entire exam. The school will hold the electronic device until the parents are contacted to come in and review together with administration the photographic content on the electronic device to ensure that no photographs or duplications of state test materials have been created. If a photograph of state test items is found on the electronic device or if the permission to search the device is refused, the district will contact the PDE and further action may be taken, as the State holds the copyright to all materials contained within the PSSA and Keystone Exams.

If after testing is complete and test materials have been returned, it is discovered that a student used and/or had a cell phone or other electronic device in his or her possession during the administration of the test, the school's discipline policy will be followed and the student's scores will be invalidated.

## **CODE OF CONDUCT FOR TEST TAKERS**

### **DO...**

- 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." Also, be sure to read any open-ended items and writing prompts carefully before responding.
- Be careful when marking your answers so that you do not skip spaces or fill in the wrong sections.
- Make sure to completely fill in the bubble for the answer you select and erase completely answers you change.
- Keep your eyes on your own test.
- Try to answer each test item.
- Check that you have completed all the test items in the test section before closing your test booklet or submitting your final responses online.
- Report any suspected cheating to your teacher or principal.

### **DO NOT...**

- Bring notes with you to the test.
- Bring any unapproved electronic devices (e.g., cell phones, smart phones, smartwatches, etc.) other than an approved calculator, if applicable, to the test.
- Share a calculator with others.
- Use the bubbles in the answer booklet to either eliminate possible incorrect answers or possible correct answers. Mark only the bubble for the one correct answer you have chosen.
- Talk with others about questions on the test during or after the test. (Students should be assured that they may discuss the testing process or issues of concern with their parents/guardians.)
- Take notes about the test to share with others.
- Leave an online test session until the session is complete or until instructed to do so.

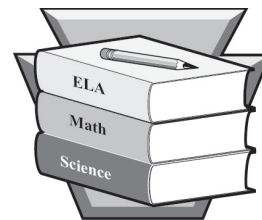
# Information for Parents or Guardians

## Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA)

English Language Arts Assessment, April 3–7, 2017

Mathematics Assessment, April 24–28, 2017

Science Assessment, May 1–5, 2017



### GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE PSSA

#### Which schools participate?

All school districts and charter schools participate in the assessments. Nonpublic and private 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:

ELA & Mathematics—Grades 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8

Science—Grades 4 and 8

#### Who decided what the assessments should measure?

Groups of educators from all levels of education in Pennsylvania chose the areas of knowledge and skills upon 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 administers the assessments?

Each school chooses the person(s) who will administer the assessments. In most cases, these are teachers in the students' building.

#### How are the results reported?

Two copies of the individual student report for all assessments will be sent to all schools and districts that participate for distribution to parents, teachers, school 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?

Yes, under one circumstance. School entities are required to have policies to ensure that parents or guardians have the right to review a state assessment in the school entity during convenient hours for parents or guardians at least two weeks prior to their administration to determine whether a state assessment conflicts with their religious belief. This is the only reason allowable under regulation.

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 or guardians find the test to be in conflict with their religious belief and wish their student(s) to be excused from the test, the right of the parents or guardians will not be denied upon written request to the applicable school district Superintendent, charter school Chief Executive Officer, or AVTS Director. Parents or guardians should contact their child's school to make arrangements to review the test.

#### Report Testing Irregularities

Parents/guardians who believe that a testing irregularity may have occurred may call 844-418-1651 to report the incident.

### INFORMATION ABOUT THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS ASSESSMENT (grades 3 through 8)

#### How long does the assessment take?

The entire English Language Arts assessment takes approximately three to four hours to complete. Your school district will inform you about the assessment schedule.

#### What does the assessment include?

Each student completes four sections of questions for the English Language Arts 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 multiple-choice, evidence-based selected-response, and constructed-response questions. In a multiple-choice question, the correct answer is chosen from four options. Evidence-based selected-response questions have two parts, and students select one or more answers for each part. Constructed-response questions may include a writing prompt, short-answer (grade 3), and/or text-dependent analysis (grades 4 through 8). The writing prompt requires students to compose a response using one of three modes: narrative (grades 3 through 8), informative/explanatory (grades 3 through 8), opinion (grades 3 through 5) or argumentative (grades 6 through 8). Short-answer questions require students to compose a brief response to support their answer. For the text-dependent analysis question, students analyze a text and use evidence from the reading passage to compose an essay.

### **How are written responses to constructed-response items scored?**

The written responses for English Language Arts are scored by evaluators trained in applying an ELA-specific scoring guideline. For short-answer questions, scores are based on content only. Spelling and punctuation are not included as part of the scoring process. For writing prompts, scores are determined using a holistic scoring guideline that includes composition skills as well as conventions. Responses to text-dependent analysis questions are scored based on both content and writing skills.

### **What is assessed in English Language Arts?**

The English Language Arts assessment addresses six major reporting categories as well as two text types. Students respond to a writing prompt and standalone multiple-choice items assessing language. Additionally, students read a number of passages from literature and informational genres and respond to questions about these passages that indicate both comprehension and reading skills and the students' analysis and interpretation of different types of texts.

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE MATHEMATICS ASSESSMENT (grades 3 through 8)**

#### **How long does the assessment take?**

The entire mathematics assessment takes approximately three to four hours to complete. Your school district will inform you about the assessment schedule.

#### **What does the assessment include?**

Each student completes three sections of questions for the mathematics 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. Open-ended questions generally require students to provide detail in support of their answers (such as showing or describing the steps performed to complete a calculation).

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

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

### **What is assessed in Mathematics?**

The mathematics assessment addresses five major reporting categories across four clusters. The reporting categories assessed and the proportion of questions in each reporting category vary by grade level. As a part of the assessment of Cluster A, Numbers and Operations, students in grades 4 through 8 respond to a set of questions without a calculator. Constructed-response items may require the students to show all of their work (e.g., calculations, graphs, drawings) and/or to explain in writing how they solved the problems.

### **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 will 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 written responses to open-ended items scored?**

The written responses for science open-ended items are scored by evaluators trained in applying a science-specific scoring guideline. 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 in each reporting category varies by grade level.