

PSSA 2016 Focus Points

BASICS

- The 2016 PSSA testing window runs from April 11 through April 29, with makeup dates the first week of May.
- The PSSA is Pennsylvania's federally and state-required standardized test, and is administered in grades 3 to 8 in English language arts and math, and grade 4 and 8 in science.
- PSSAs, which were first aligned to the PA Core Standards in 2015, will be used to calculate the 2016 School Performance Profile (SPP) scores for schools in the commonwealth.
- The PA Core Standards are rigorous academic standards, adopted by the Pennsylvania State Board of Education, to better prepare students for the 21st century work force.
- In districts across Pennsylvania, schools and teachers have been working diligently to align curriculum to the new classroom requirements of the PA Core Standards; and school administrators continue to work to effectively administer the assessment.
- Years of budget cuts and the 2015-16 state budget impasse have hindered some districts from fully transitioning their curriculum and classroom instruction to the PA Core, and limited their ability to invest in proven resources like additional teachers, fully resourced libraries, extended time learning opportunities for students, new textbooks and other materials, and other tools, to help students adjust to the new, rigorous standards.
- Student assessment scores on the PSSA are reported via four performance levels: Below Basic, Basic, Proficient, and Advanced.

OPTOUTS

- Although in recent years there has been an uptick in the number of students opting out of the PSSAs, those numbers remain a small fraction of the total test population.
- Official numbers of students opting out will not be available until the summer.

TEACHER EVALUATIONS

- As required under Pennsylvania statute, Act 82, classroom educators who teach the tested grades and subject areas will continue to receive teacher evaluation scores based in part on a three year average of their students' growth in test scores.
- Per Act 82, all educators will also have a 2016 school-based SPP score attributed to their evaluation.

THE FUTURE of STANDARDIZED TESTS and SCHOOL EVALUATION

- In addition to fulfilling state and federal requirements, state assessments provide educators, stakeholders, and policymakers with important information about the commonwealth's students and schools, to inform instructional practices and help inform students and their parents about students' academic progress.
 - Assessment scores can be used as benchmarks to measure the growth of what a student knows and is able to do.
 - Assessment scores can be used to measure the growth of the academic performance of groups of students: entire school, by grade level, or by identified subgroup.
 - Assessment scores are important tools to measure achievement gaps in the academic performance of identified subgroups.
- Governor Wolf and Secretary Rivera believe standardized tests can be a useful tool for measuring student performance, but that scores only reflect a snapshot in time, and that the current School Performance Profile (SPP) is overly reliant on the use of standardized test scores as the indicator of a school's success in preparing students to graduate from high school college and career ready.
- At the governor's direction, the Department of Education has engaged with hundreds of education stakeholders including teachers, administrators, lawmakers, parents,

industry partners, and higher education representatives at meetings around the state to consider ways to make the SPP a better tool to more holistically evaluate schools.

- While states are now granted broad discretion regarding assessment under the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the state is still required to provide for statewide assessment in designated grades and subjects and Pennsylvania's Act 82 still specifically requires the use of PSSA and Keystones Exams.

SCORING TRENDS

- It is important to note that while Pennsylvania's new Core Standards are more rigorous and aimed at preparing students for college and career readiness, even under the former PA Academic Standards, student scores on the PSSA had steadily declined for multiple years before the implementation of the PA Core.
- The experience of other states has demonstrated that it may take several years to fully transition to the more rigorous standards, and other states have experienced dips in scores for consecutive years before scores began to rebound.