

**2001 Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA)
Grades 3-8 and 11 Reading and Mathematics Assessments
Information for Parents or Guardians**

PSSA is designed to provide information about the quality of public schools to parents, school districts and the general public. Frequent questions and answers about the PSSA are:

Who is participating?

In all 501 school districts, students in grades 3-8 and 11 will take the reading and mathematics assessments. Nonpublic and private schools may participate on a voluntary basis.

When will the assessment occur? How long will it take?

The assessment will be scheduled by the school district to take place between March 26 through April 27, 2001. (Some sites will participate in early testing starting on March 19 through March 30, 2001.) The reading and mathematics assessments will take a total of about eight hours. Your school district should inform you about the assessment schedule.

Which students will take the assessments?

Since the assessment is designed to help determine the quality of the school programs, all students participating in those school programs should be included in the assessment. This excludes only a very few students in special programs and those with limited English proficiency.

If parents don't want their children to respond to specific items or to participate in the reading or mathematics assessment due to a conflict with their religious beliefs, they may write a note to the School District Superintendent to excuse their child from the assessment.

Who will administer the assessment?

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

Can parents see the assessment forms?

Parents may review the reading and mathematics items by making arrangements with the school assessment coordinator once the assessments arrive at the school. No copies of the assessments or notes about items will be permitted to leave the school. Since there are multiple forms, there is no way to determine which form or prompt a student will be receiving, so parents will be allowed to review all forms for their child's grade level.

What will the assessments include?

Each student will take two sets of items for each of reading and mathematics. The first set will be the same for all students. The second set will consist of different groups of items distributed randomly. These different items allow broader coverage of the reading and mathematics content taught by the schools.

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 elementary, middle/junior and senior high school teachers, supervisors, curriculum directors and college specialists. They also wrote the questions or chose them from items written especially for Pennsylvania.

What will be assessed in reading?

The reading assessment addresses two elements of the reading process. Students will (1) indicate the use of effective strategies for *before*, *during* or *after* reading situations, and (2) after reading either a narrative or informational passage, they will be questioned about their comprehension of what was read. In addition, students respond to items related to the characteristics and functions of the English language and research skills. There will also be tasks that require students to write their responses in paragraph form to supplement the multiple-choice items.

What will be assessed in mathematics?

Through the use of both multiple-choice items and open-ended tasks, the mathematics assessment addresses eleven major standards categories. The proportion of items devoted to each standards category varies by grade level. As a part of the assessment of standard number two, *Computation and Estimation*, students will respond to a special section of items in which a calculator will not be permitted. The open-ended tasks require the students to show all of their mathematical work (calculations, graphs, drawings, etc.) and explain in writing how they solved the problems.

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-set scoring system. In reading and mathematics, scores will be based on content.

How will the results be reported?

Two copies of the individual student results for mathematics and reading will be sent to the school districts for distribution to parents, teachers, 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 results of PSSA testing for each school. The state will also release school-by-school assessment data.