

February 2002 Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA)

Grade 11 Writing Assessment

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 grade 11 will take the writing assessment. 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 February 11 through February 22, 2002. Several school districts have volunteered to participate in an early assessment to take place February 4 through 15, 2002. The writing assessment will take a total of about three hours. Your school district should inform you about the assessment schedule.

What will the assessment include?

Each student will respond to three writing prompts or questions. These different writing prompts allow broader coverage of the writing skills taught by the schools. In addition, students will be asked to respond to items about the strategies they use when writing and how writing is taught in their classrooms.

Which students will take the writing assessment?

Since the assessment is designed to help determine the quality of the school programs, all students are to be included in the assessment. The only exceptions are those few students with limited English proficiency.

If parents don't want their child to respond to a specific prompt or to participate in the writing 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 person(s) 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 writing prompts?

Parents may review the writing prompts by making arrangements with the school assessment coordinator once the prompts arrive at the school. No copies of the prompts or notes about assessment items will be permitted to leave the school.

Who decided what the assessment should measure?

Groups of educators from all levels of education in Pennsylvania chose the areas of knowledge on which the assessment is based. The groups included middle/junior and senior high school teachers, supervisors, curriculum directors and college specialists. They also wrote the prompts or chose them from prompts written especially for Pennsylvania.

What will be assessed in writing?

The writing assessment provides a direct, or performance, measure of students' writing abilities to develop, organize, and express their ideas in a variety of writing types. The writing assessment is intended to evaluate performances of individual students, to provide comparative data about the school's writing program, and to serve as a validity check of the school's local assessment of writing.

How will the written responses be scored?

The written responses to the writing prompts will be scored by evaluators trained in applying a domain scoring system. The domain scoring system addresses five characteristics of effective writing: focus, content, organization, style and conventions. Each domain is scored separately on a 4-point scale to indicate the writer's level of competence.

How will the results be reported?

Two copies of the individual student report for writing 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 may publish the results of PSSA testing for each school. The State will also release school-by-school assessment data