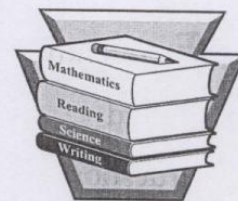


Frequently
Asked
Questions

Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA)
**Reading and
Mathematics Assessment**
Grades 3 – 8 and 11— March 2009
Information for Parents or Guardians



Which schools participate?

All school districts participate in the reading and mathematics assessments. Nonpublic and private schools may also participate on a voluntary basis.

Which students take the assessments?

All students in grades 3 – 8 and 11 are included in the assessments (except for a few students who meet specific criteria).

When do the assessments occur?

The assessments are scheduled by the school district to take place during the testing window of March 16 through March 27, 2009.

How long do the assessments take?

The entire reading and mathematics assessments take approximately six to seven hours to complete. Your school district should inform you about the assessment schedule.

What do the assessments include?

Each student completes three sections of items for each of the reading and mathematics assessments. Some sections will be the same for all students and some sections will consist of different groups of items.

What types of questions are on the assessments?

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.

How are the written responses to open-ended items scored?

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

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 teachers, supervisors, curriculum directors, and college specialists. These same groups also reviewed, edited, and approved items that were written to align with Pennsylvania's assessment anchors.

Who administers the assessments?

Each school chooses the person(s) who will administer the assessments. In most cases, these are the students' teachers, who are often helped by the principal or a guidance counselor.

What is assessed in reading?

The reading assessment addresses two major reporting categories that encompass the reading process. Students read a number of passages from both fictional and nonfictional genres and respond to questions about these passages. By answering these questions, students indicate both their comprehension and reading skills and their analysis and interpretation of fictional and nonfictional text.

What is assessed in mathematics?

The mathematics assessment addresses five major reporting categories. The proportion of items devoted to each reporting category varies by grade level. As a part of the assessment of Reporting Category A, *Numbers and Operations*, students respond to a special section of items in which the use of a calculator is not permitted. Open-ended items within the assessment require the students to show all of their mathematical work (calculations, graphs, drawings, etc.) and to explain in writing how they solved the problems.

How are the results reported?

Reports for reading and mathematics are sent to the school districts for distribution to parents, teachers, and guidance counselors and/or principals. The state does not receive any reports with individual names included.

Results are reported by school for curricular and planning purposes. School districts publish the PSSA testing results for each school. The state also releases school-by-school assessment data.

May parents see the assessments?

Parents and guardians may review the assessments by making arrangements with the school assessment coordinator once the assessments arrive at the school. No copies of the assessments or notes about items are permitted to leave the school and confidentiality agreements must be signed.

If, after reviewing the assessments, parents do not want their child to participate in the mathematics or reading assessments due to a conflict with their religious beliefs, they may write a note to the school district superintendent prior to the beginning of the assessments to excuse their child from the assessments.