

Frequently  
Asked  
Questions

Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA)  
**Science Assessment**  
**Grades 4, 8, and 11—April/May 2009**  
**Information for Parents or Guardians**



**Which schools participate?**

All school districts participate in the science assessment. Nonpublic and private schools may also participate on a voluntary basis.

**Which students take the assessment?**

All students in grades 4, 8, and 11 are included in the assessment (except for a few students who meet specific criteria).

**When does the assessment occur?**

The assessment is scheduled by the school district to take place during the testing window of April 27 through May 8, 2009.

**How long does the assessment take?**

The entire science assessment takes approximately two to four hours to complete. Your school district should inform you about the assessment schedule.

**What does the assessment include?**

Students in grades 4 and 8 complete two sections of items for the science assessment; grade 11 students complete three sections. Some items will be the same for all students and some portions of the assessment will consist of different groups of items.

**Who administers 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 a guidance counselor.

**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 grades 8 and 11, 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 both multiple-choice and open-ended questions. Science scenarios are used at grade 8 and grade 11 only.

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

The written responses for science open-ended items are scored by evaluators trained in applying a pre-determined scoring system. In science, 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 assessment is based. The groups included teachers, supervisors, curriculum directors, and college specialists. These educators also reviewed, edited, and approved items that were written to align with Pennsylvania's assessment anchors.

**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 devoted to each reporting category varies within a grade level. Each reporting category includes certain Assessment Anchors and Eligible Content.

**How are the results reported?**

Reports for science 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 assessment?**

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

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