

**Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE)
Assessment and Accountability in the Fifty States: 1999-2000**

PENNSYLVANIA

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The Pennsylvania State Assessment System

- ***Grade Levels and Subjects Tested***

The Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) tests students in the following areas and grades:

- Reading and Math Tests in Grades 5, 8, and 11
- Writing Tests in Grades 6, 9 and 11

- ***Norm or Criterion Referenced*** – Criterion

- ***Matrix or Census Testing*** – Census

- ***Item Types***

State assessment instruments include essay or open-ended response items in addition to other item formats. The proportion of item types will vary by grade level. The items on the mathematics test are enhanced multiple-choice and open-ended (each student explains how s/he arrives at the answer).

- Reading: multiple choice and open-ended
- Math: enhanced and open-ended
- Writing: Nine prompts are used to assess Narrative/imaginative writing, informational writing, and persuasive writing – three prompts of each type. Students receive a randomly assigned prompt.

- ***Student Performance Levels***

Proficiency levels have just recently been approved, but will be “developed and refined” over the next two years. The four levels are:

- Advanced
- Proficient
- Basic
- Below Basic.

- ***Inclusion Policies***

All students are supposed to participate in the statewide assessment, including those with disabilities. Local districts can make accommodations in the assessment process for students with special needs. Students may be excluded in the following ways:

- Parents have the right to have their children excluded for any reason upon written request
- Chapter 5 of the PSSA allows for the assessment of student learning outcomes by the attainment of IEP goals
- Students with IEPs may be excluded from assessments when requested by the IEP team due to “emotional stress caused by the assessment”
- Students can exclude themselves by not attempting the minimum number of items or tasks in each section of the assessment.

PDE staff reportedly do not know to what degree students with disabilities participate in the statewide assessments, since data is not disaggregated by disability.

Accommodations: guidelines state that students with disabilities should participate in the assessment and should be provided with the same adaptations and accommodations as they receive during normal instruction. Accommodations may include:

- personal assistance (Reading or Sign Language)
- test modifications (Braille and large print)
- environmental changes (extended time)
- response formats (allowing oral vs. written responses)
- assistive devices (calculators).

- ***Other Assessments***

See local assessment requirements.

- ***State requirements for local assessment***

Each school district is required to design an assessment system to do the following:

- determine the degree to which students are achieving standards under Chapter 4
- use assessment results to improve curriculum and instructional practices, guide instructional strategies and develop future strategic plans
- provide information requested by the SDE regarding achievement of academic standards
- provide summary information including results of assessments under the local assessment system to the general public.

The local district assessment will be implemented no later than one year after its strategic plan or revision is approved by the SBE, and may include a variety of measures including written work, art and music, national achievement tests, evaluations of portfolio's, etc. *Children with disabilities will be included in this assessment system.*

Performance Data

- ***What data are reported?***

The PSSA requires schools and districts to release **Pennsylvania School and District Profiles**. School Profiles include the following indicators:

1. enrollment
2. student attendance
3. percent low income
4. student mobility in tested grades
5. post high school activities for graduates
6. dropout rates
7. class size
8. number of professional staff
9. teacher absenteeism and professional development
10. academic and support programs
11. vocational education programs
12. technology and library resources
13. percentage of students taking college exams
14. PSSA results
15. Title I eligibility and programs

District Profiles include the following indicators:

1. current expenditures
2. enrollment
3. attendance rates
4. percent low income
5. number of staff
6. teacher absenteeism and professional development
7. staff salaries
8. PSSA results
9. commercial standardized test usage and portfolio usage.

- ***How are the data distributed?***

Schools that provide programs serving more than one educational level (for example, schools that serve kindergarten through grade 12) may have two or possibly three School Profiles.

- **Primary Level** profiles are designed for primary schools that serve grade 4 or below.

- **Intermediate Level** profiles are primarily designed for elementary schools that serve grade(s) 5 and/or 6.

- **Middle Level** profiles are primarily designed for middle or junior high schools that serve any combination of grades 6-9.

- **High School Level** profiles are primarily designed for high schools that serve any combination of grades 9-12.

- ***How is the data disaggregated?***

The Commonwealth only collects aggregate scores from schools and districts. However, individual student results are available to school officials and used for instructional planning.

The Pennsylvania State Accountability System

The Commonwealth uses rewards and performance reporting to move schools toward higher achievement.

- ***Student Accountability***

Students are held accountable for PSSA scores and/or local assessment scores at the high school level. Local districts determine graduation requirements, although the state determines the minimum requirements for graduation. As of 2002-03, students must demonstrate performance at the proficient level or better in reading, writing and mathematics on either the state assessments administered in grade 11 or 12 or local assessments aligned with academic standards or both. The local school district's board of directors must decide whether it will use the PSSA, its own local assessments or both as one of its graduation requirements. The only requirement that the Commonwealth mandates is that, at a minimum, students perform at the proficient level or better in reading, writing and mathematics in order to graduate.

Beginning in the school year 2002-03, students who attain a score at the proficient level or better on state assessments in reading, writing, and mathematics in grade 11 or 12 shall be granted a **Pennsylvania Seal of Proficiency**. Students who attain a score at the advanced level of proficiency on assessments in reading, writing and math in grade 11 or 12 shall be granted a **Pennsylvania Seal of Distinction**. By regulation, these State Seals of Proficiency or Distinction shall be affixed to diplomas and noted on student transcripts.

- ***School Accountability***

Schools are held accountable for PSSA scores and "effort" at improving school graduation and attendance rates through the state system of rewards. Comprehensive vocational technical schools use job-related placements as a measure of improvement in achievement in addition to the PSSA results.

Additionally for **Title I**, districts must establish performance levels and determine measures they would use to assess student progress, so that it is the *district* that is responsible for identifying Title I schools not making progress. The schools are required to improve performance by moving 5% of students from a lower to a higher category in reading and mathematics. Results are cumulative over time, which means that if a school only make 3% change the first year, that same school will need to make a 7% change the following year.

Sanctions and Rewards

Schools that attain a meaningful increase (50 combined points on the PSSA tests) in student achievement receive awards of between \$7.50 and \$37.50 per student depending on the level of increase over the minimum 50 points. Schools that attain a meaningful increase in effort (improved attendance and/or graduation rates) will receive an incentive payment of between \$6.00 and \$37.50 per student depending on the level of increase over the 0.75 percent increase. Schools have up to three years to accomplish meaningful increases; after three years without improvement, a new baseline is established. If a school declines, a new baseline is not established; the school must first work back to the original baseline to be eligible.

Only **Title I** schools may be placed in program improvement.

- ***District Accountability***

Every six years each district is required to write a strategic plan to guide how the schools will help students achieve identified learning outcomes. The plans become public documents for community and parental review, input, and engagement.

There are no formal consequences for district performance using the accountability criteria.

- ***Subgroup Performance as an Indicator***

Subgroups are not formally considered in determining rewards or identification for program improvement under Title I.

Identifying and Assisting Low Performing Schools

- ***Identification***

With the passage of the **Education Empowerment Act** in May 2000, the PSSA will be used to identify districts with a history of low performance – defined as districts that have a combined average of 50 percent or more of its students scoring in the bottom-measured group in the PSSA in math and reading for the previous two years.

Title I schools are eligible for program improvement. The criteria for not making adequate yearly progress for two consecutive years includes data from the PSSA and local assessment information.

- ***Assistance***

As part of the Education Empowerment Act, the SDE will establish an Academic Advisory Team for each district to work with the School District Empowerment Team and teachers to develop a plan to improve student performance and the management and operation of the school district. School districts on the Education Empowerment List would receive extensive, *optional* new powers and tools to redesign the district's educational system. Specifically, they could transform schools into custom-designed charter schools or independently-managed schools; reconstitute schools and hire new managers and employees; conduct instructional, fiscal and performance audits to better manage tax dollars and improve performance; and sign agreements with for-profit and non-profit entities to operate and manage schools or provide educational services for students.

The \$25 million in school improvement grants will help school districts on the Education Empowerment List buy new instructional materials; establish after-school, summer and weekend programs; develop curriculum and provide professional development training for teachers.

However, if after three or four years of the assistance outlined these school districts are unable to improve, a new team – led by the Secretary of Education and called a Board of Control – would assume control of the district.

- ***Who provides the support?***

State and District Accountability Systems and the Federal Role – 6/2000

The SDE will provide the support outlined in the Education Empowerment Act through the an Academic Advisory Teams. Intermediate units and districts also provide more general technical support.

- ***Does support to Title I schools differ?***

No. Each intermediate unit has an individual unit to assist schools receiving IASA funding.

Alignment of the State Accountability System and Title I

The state has not established an accountability system in compliance with Title I regulations for all schools, and the definition of adequate yearly progress only applies to Title I schools. The state has developed a transitional definition for adequate yearly progress and program improvement, but the districts establish performance levels, graduation requirements and identify Title I schools not making adequate yearly progress and those eligible for program improvement.

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Title I

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