

ASSESSMENT UPDATE Spring 2025

2025 Spring Assessments: New Grade and New Item Types

The 2025 PSSA Science tests will be administered in grades 5 and 8—no longer grades 4 and 8. The STEELS-aligned census field test (Science, Technology & Engineering, Environmental Literacy & Sustainability) will be administered to all students and all online and paper accommodations will be available to support full student participation.

LEAs will receive aggregated data from the Science tests that show how a student performed on the field test items in comparison to the entire testing population (percentile reports). Science data will not be included in the 2025 PSSA District Student Data Files, Individual Student Reports (ISRs), Summary Reports, or Data Interaction.

All spring online assessments, both the PSSA and Keystone Exams, will include a small number of Technology Enhanced items (TE) that replace some traditional multiple-choice items. These innovative item types allow students to utilize features such as click-to-respond, drag-and-drop, and text highlighting to interact with test content in a way that takes advantage of the online format.

The PSSA and Keystone Online Tools Training (OTT) were updated this year to include TE items for all subjects. Schools that administer the assessments online should provide an opportunity for students to interact with the OTTs prior to the administration of the assessment.

Firefly Success

On November 18, PDE launched a brand new, custom benchmark assessment that is aligned to Pennsylvania standards—Pennsylvania Firefly Student Progress Indicators. Since that date, more than 300,000 Firefly tests have been administered across the Commonwealth!

PA Firefly offers free, high-quality benchmark assessments that are designed for Pennsylvania and measure the same knowledge and skills as the PSSA and Keystone Exams. The fully online, computer-adaptive assessments are available for ELA and Mathematics until April 18, 2025, and for Algebra I and Literature until May 9, 2025. The assessment will be expanded to include Science and Biology in 2025-2026.

The interest and support of PA Firefly has affirmed PDE's initiative to provide schools with a new option for benchmark assessments. The Firefly program will be further expanded in 2025-2026 to include predictions for student performance on the summative assessments and to provide a variety of interactive reports and instructional support materials. More information about next year's reports and scheduled releases will be provided in early fall.

It's not too late to participate in the 2024-2025 Firefly pilot! With the spring assessments on the horizon, schools still have time to administer or re-administer the Firefly assessments to gauge student readiness for the PSSA or Spring Keystone Exams (students may take a Firefly test up to three times).

Additional information can be found on PDE's website (under "Online Assessment Resources"), the DRC INSIGHT Portal, and DRC's resources and training site:

sites.google.com/datarecognitioncorp.com/psa-assessments/home).

Statewide Online Testing is Coming

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) announced in April 2024 that all PSSA and Keystone Exams testing will transition to online in the spring of 2026. Accordingly, the 2025 spring assessments, along with the 2025 Summer Keystone Exams and the 2025/2026 Winter Keystone Exams, will be the last assessments for which schools can choose between the two testing modes (paper/pencil or online).

Beginning with the spring 2026 summative assessments, only students with specific accommodations or in unique settings will be allowed access to paper tests. (Paper versions of large print and Braille will also continue to be available.) All other students will participate in the online administration. PDE intends to continue to provide schools with paper copies of the Handbook for Assessment Coordinators, the Direction for Administration Manuals, and certain reference sheets. Most testing sites will receive automatic shipments of these materials based on statewide enrollment data and past participation.

The transition to online testing is meant to offer benefits for students and educators alike. It will align the student testing experience with their regular classroom/homework experiences; and it will streamline the assessment process and reduce the administrative burden of receiving, distributing, collecting, and returning paper materials. PDE is encouraging LEAs to consider transitioning to online testing in 2025, and LEAs are reminded that there is no restriction on administering both paper and online tests at the district, school, grade, content area, or student level in 2025.

DRC has a wide array of technology resources available on the DRC INSIGHT Portal to support transitioning to and maintaining online testing. In addition, PDE has been hosting a variety of live and webinar sessions to help LEAs prepare for the transition. These resources, coupled with DRC's customer service support, will ensure that all LEAs experience a successful transition to a new era of summative testing.

Spanish Tests Will Be Moving Online in 2026

As part of the transition to statewide online testing in spring 2026, the Spanish tests for PSSA and the Keystone Exams will also be online! Students who require a Spanish accommodation for next spring's summative assessments will access their tests through the same online platform that delivers all of Pennsylvania's assessments—DRC INSIGHT.

Schools will be able to add students who require Spanish to any online test session in spring 2026; they do not need to be uploaded to separate test sessions. A new online accommodation will ensure that the students receive the Spanish version of the assessment. The online Spanish tests will also include embedded English reference, thus eliminating the need for students to receive separate materials for English reference.

More information on this exciting transition will be available in the fall.

Testing Devices and Software

If supportive software has been added to the devices on which your students will take the state assessments (e.g., Grammarly), it's important that you have a plan for disabling the software during the test administration. DRC's INSIGHT test engine blocks student access to standard system applications when the test is launched. However, add-on software that is not part of a device's standard operating system must be disabled by the school prior to testing. PDE's expectation is that student access to supportive software will be restricted unless explicit approval has been granted by the department.

For more information and support for this topic, please access the Technology User Guide from the DRC INSIGHT Portal. Technology staff should call DRC Customer Service if additional information is needed.

Online Parental Reviews

LEAs that administer assessment online can eliminate the additional work of managing paper materials by using online test tickets for parental reviews. Every District Assessment Coordinator (DAC) will be able to access Parental Review test tickets via the DRC INSIGHT Portal starting April 7, 2025.

To access the online Parental Review Test Tickets:

1. Log into the DRC INSIGHT Portal
2. Choose the "My Applications" dropdown menu, and then "Test Management"
3. Next, choose "Manage Test Sessions"
4. Under Administration, choose the correct administration
5. Choose "SAMPLE DISTRICT – 412345678" from the District drop down
6. The School dropdown will display "PARENTAL REVIEWS"
7. Click the Show Sessions button.

The Sessions table will populate. Choose the printer icon for the assessment for which you need Parental Review Test Tickets. There will be ten test tickets per assessment that can be distributed to your schools, if needed. Test tickets can be re-used as needed for parental reviews. Parents should be instructed not to select the submit button to end the review. Instead, selecting pause and exit to end the review will allow the test ticket to be re-used for additional reviews. LEAs must continue to follow the security procedures outlined in the Handbook for Assessment Coordinator that are required when a parent/guardian is reviewing a paper test.

Corrections Systems – Summer 2025

The Keystone Corrections System, the Grades 3-8 Attribution System, and the Grade 11 Attribution System serve the sole purpose of providing districts and schools an opportunity to ensure that the student data used for administration and accountability reporting is accurate and complete. In addition, the systems have been scheduled in a manner that attempts to minimize conflicts with holidays and other summer events.

These systems allow you to match students to PIMS, to correct a student's district or school assignment, or to make a manual match to a student's results from a previous Keystone Exam. PDE's expectation is that all LEAs will leverage these important systems to make all allowed corrections before final reporting files are produced. LEAs that do not utilize the systems will not have an opportunity to fix incorrect data in final reporting.

All Coordinators must be aware of the dates and expectations of each corrections system.

Grades 3-8 Attributions System Window | June 19-27, 2025

Spring Keystone Corrections Window | June 19-24, 2025

Grade 11 Attributions System Window | July 23-25, 2025

Administration Training Resources

Training is vital for a successful test administration, and LEAs are provided with multiple resources on PDE's website to initiate and facilitate meaningful training sessions for district and school assessment coordinators and test administrators. In addition to those resources, it's important for assessment coordinators to remember that DRC-specific training resources are available on the PSA Assessments website: <https://sites.google.com/datarecognitioncorp.com/psa-assessments/home>.

This site provides quick and easy access to some of the most frequently used resource and training materials, including videos of the administration training for both the paper/pencil and online administrations. This site supplements what is already available to you on the DRC INSIGHT Portal, but it is streamlined to take you directly to the materials and training you'll need for a successful administration of the assessments.



Scan QR code to access site

Section-Specific Test Tickets

Historically, students testing online used the same test ticket/password to access all sections of their test.

This required Test Administrators and Coordinators to collect and re-distribute the test tickets to administer each subsequent test section.

This spring, the test tickets produced from the DRC INSIGHT Portal will be separate for each module of the Keystone Exam or section of the PSSA tests.

To increase the efficiency of the new process, a student's test tickets will appear within the same PDF output for that test session.

The impetus for the change was to ensure that students only log into the module or section that is being administered.

Having test tickets that access a single link will prohibit students from accidentally logging into the wrong session.

The single-section test tickets will also eliminate the need for school personnel to inspect and securely store multi-section tickets.

The result will be an easier material-handling process and the elimination of avoidable mistakes that often need to be reported to PDE.

2025 IMPORTANT DATES

PSSA

Secure Test Materials Arrive at Districts/Schools	By April 7, 2025
English Language Arts Test Window	April 21-25, 2025
Mathematics, Science, Make-up Test Window	April 28-May 2, 2025
Mathematics, Science, Make-up Test Window (OPTIONAL)	May 5-9, 2025
Deadline to Return Materials - Early Reports	May 2, 2025
Deadline to Return Materials - Regular Reports	May 14, 2025
Student Data Files Posted - Early Reports	June 2, 2025
Student Data Files Posted - Regular Reports	June 24, 2025
Grades 3-8 Attributions Window	June 19-27, 2025
Grade 11 Attributions Window	July 23-25, 2025
Student Data Files Posted - Accountability Reports	August 18, 2025

Spring Keystone

Secure Test Materials Arrive	By April 28, 2025
Testing Window	May 12-23, 2025
Deadline for Districts to Return Materials	May 29, 2025
Keystone Correction Window	June 19-24, 2025
Student Data Files Posted	July 14, 2025

Summer Keystone

Enrollment Window	June 10-12, 2025
Test Setup Window for Precode Labels	June 10-12, 2025
Testing Window	July 28-August 1, 2025

Classroom Diagnostic Tools

Close of the 2024-2025 Testing Window	June 13, 2025
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Committee Meetings

Are you interested in becoming more involved with the Pennsylvania assessments? PDE is looking for educators to serve on various committees to review test items, determine scoring rules for open-ended responses, and more!

Participating educators are rewarded with rich professional development experiences and Act 48 hours as well.

Click [here](#) or scan the code with your smart phone.

