

Here is what you need to know about the PA State Assessments:

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) requires Pennsylvania public school students to take two types of standardized assessments: the [Pennsylvania System of School Assessment \(PSSA\)](#) in grades 3-8, and the [Keystone exams](#) in grades 8-11. These federal assessment requirements began with the 2001 ESEA Reauthorization, called the No Child Left Behind Act (NLCB). The current version of ESEA, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), does nothing to reduce the number of required tests or the number of grades or content areas that must be tested.

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) aims to support schools, teachers, and principals; provide students with equitable learning opportunities; and strengthen the communications between state and local education agencies (LEAs) and the communities they serve. Assessments, required by ESSA, are a tool to help identify students and schools who may need additional support, thereby informing investment and programming decisions to ensure equitable outcomes.

PSSAs are secure, in-person standardized tests, and results are used for required federal accountability purposes. Students in grades 3-8 are tested in English Language Arts (ELA) and Math, and students in grades 4 and 8 are also tested in Science.

The Keystone exams are capstone tests for core courses in Literature, Algebra I, and Biology, typically taken by students in grades 8-11 the same year they complete the associated course; however, students can repeat an exam if desired. For accountability and reporting, PDE uses the highest Keystone score received by the end of grade 11, known as “Best by 11th.” The Keystone exams are utilized for required federal accountability purposes.

Note that, nationwide, Covid-19 disrupted the administration of state standardized tests in both the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years. In spring 2020, the administration of PSSAs and Keystones was canceled entirely in Pennsylvania. In spring 2021, PDE administered PSSAs only to students who had returned to in-person hybrid learning, under guidance from PDE that the results would not be used for accountability purposes. In fall 2021, students who returned to school in person took the Keystones. The 2021-22 school year was the first year that the PSSAs and Keystones were administered normally since 2018-19 (pre-pandemic) and results were utilized by PDE for district/school for accountability purposes.

Participation in the PA State Assessments.

The school’s participation rate can potentially have a negative impact on the school’s accountability status. The United States Department of Education (USDE) requires 95% participation on federally mandated assessments to ensure a relevant sampling of students and valid, reliable data. Student subgroups, including students with disabilities and those with limited English Proficiency, must also have a participation rate of at least 95%.

When participation rates fall below 95 percent, each subsequent non-tested student must be counted as non-proficient. Participation and performance are connected to various processes, including potential eligibility for federal funding. In accordance with Pennsylvania’s Consolidated State Plan, school entities not meeting the 95% threshold are required to submit a plan for improvement to the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE).

Please Note:

When school participation rates fall below 95%, each subsequent non-tested student is designated as non-proficient. Therefore, the district will incur a negative impact on student participation rate for district/school federal/state accountability measures for every student who does not complete the assessment. Therefore, it is important that your child/children participate in the PA State Assessments.