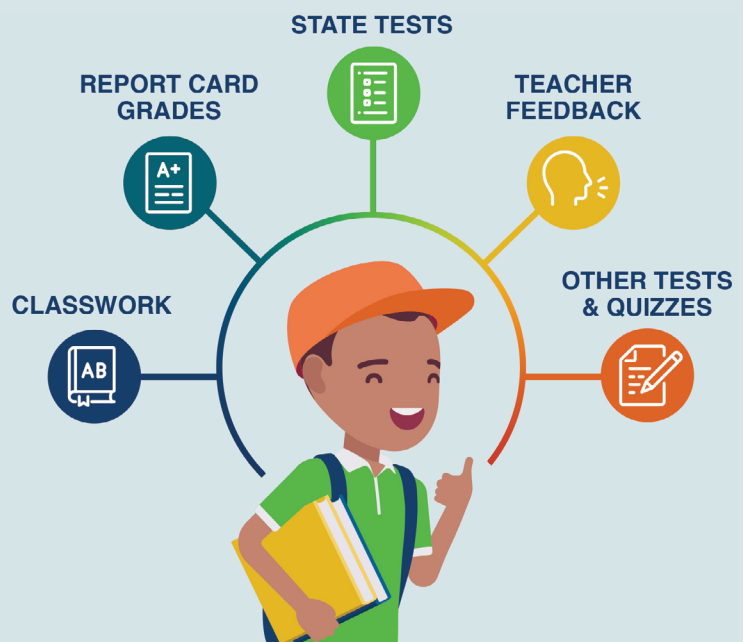




## A FAMILY GUIDE TO ANNUAL STATE TESTS IN PENNSYLVANIA: One of Many Measures of Student Learning

There are many ways to measure academic performance, and annual state tests are only one of them. These tests are not meant to tell the whole story. They are meant to be combined with other measures, including teacher feedback, classwork and projects, and report card grades. Together, these measures can give families a more complete picture of a student's performance so they can better support learning at home and advocate for their child.



### State Assessments 101

The Every Student Succeeds Act or ESSA, requires students to take state tests in reading and math every year in third through eighth grade and once in high school. In Pennsylvania, students in third through eighth grade take the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) in English language arts and math. Students in fourth and eighth grade also take a test in science. High school students take end-of-course tests known as the Keystone Exams in Algebra 1 and 2, Geometry, English, Biology/Chemistry, U.S. History, World History, Civics and Government.

## A Focus on Grade Level Skills

Unlike other tests, the PSSA is focused on grade level material and is aligned to the state standards. The test questions match what students do and learn in the classroom every day throughout the year, which are the skills that are most important for students to learn in order to move on to more challenging content.

The PSSA can be taken online or with paper and pencil. The test includes a variety of different types of questions, including traditional multiple choice as well as questions that ask students to analyze text and write well developed essays.

### Grade 6: Math

A scientist is studying the effects of temperature variation in liquids. A liquid begins with a temperature of  $-4^{\circ}\text{C}$ .

After that, the scientist heats the liquid until it reaches a temperature with a value that is the opposite of the value of the beginning temperature. To what temperature does the scientist heat the liquid?

- A  $-8^{\circ}\text{C}$
- B  $-\frac{1}{4}^{\circ}\text{C}$
- C  $\frac{1}{4}^{\circ}\text{C}$
- D  $4^{\circ}\text{C}$

### Grade 3: ELA

The sun was rising in the east.  
It barely cleared the trees.  
The wind was blowing from the west,  
A soft and gentle breeze.

I walked along the lovely beach,  
Just taking in the sights,  
And passed by people hunting shells,  
Some youngsters flying kites.

The rolling waves came into shore  
And surged up on the beach,  
While sand crabs scampered in their holes  
As far as they could reach.

And sandpipers, in unison,  
Moved left and then to right;  
Their movement was so magical  
It was a pretty sight.

They searched for critters in the sand  
Until the surf approached.  
Then turned and briskly walked away  
As though they all were coached.

Giant tracks of loggerheads were there.  
They lay their eggs at night.  
The turtles then go back to sea,  
Before the morning light.

And pelicans stood on the dock.  
They'd sit and wait and look  
For fishermen to catch a fish,  
Then dive and clean his hook.

With seagulls screeching overhead  
And egrets, tall and grand,  
The beach is such an awesome place,  
A kingdom in the sand.

**What lesson can be learned from the speaker of the poem? Use details from the poem to support your answer.**



## Useful Information for All

### **FAMILIES:** Understanding Grade Level Performance

The PSSA report gives families information on how well their child performed on different sets of skills in each subject. Families can use this information to identify where their child is doing well and where they may need support or practice. This helps families better support learning at home. It can also help them start meaningful conversations with teachers, to set goals for each student's areas of improvement and identify resources and strategies that can be used at home and in school to help students make progress.

#### **Questions to Ask the Teacher about Your Child's PSSA Report :**

- What does this mean about my child's learning?
- Is my child on grade level?
- Where does my child need more support or improvement?
- What are short term learning goals for my child to measure/show progress?
- How can I support learning at home?



### **TEACHERS:** Informing Instruction

Students take different types of tests throughout the school year. Some students take benchmark or diagnostic tests, such as MAP Growth, i-Ready or mCLASS. These are taken several times a year and measure mastery of important concepts and skills in reading and math. Students take a test at the beginning of the year to identify their “starting point” and again throughout the year to measure their progress. Benchmark tests help teachers identify and address learning gaps early on so students can stay on track to meet grade level expectations. While the PSSA is only given at the end of the school year, it is one way of showing how much progress students made from the beginning of the year and how well they met grade level expectations.

Teachers can use PSSA results from the previous year to understand each student's unique needs, support them in the areas where they need extra help and challenge them in areas where they are excelling. The test results can also help teachers to modify their instruction from one year to the next. They can use the results to look for trends in their students' learning to see what skills or concepts students mastered and what content they struggled with. This helps teachers identify academic standards that might require different instructional strategies.

### **SCHOOL & DISTRICT LEADERS:** Informing Decisions

PSSA results are critical for school and district leaders to make informed decisions about schools and students. School and district level test scores show leaders how students across a school or district are performing and indicate if a certain group of students or schools need more support. This allows them to target additional support or resources to help those schools improve. District leaders can also use PSSA scores to understand what strategies and changes are working.



### **STATE LEADERS:** Helping Schools Improve

State leaders use PSSA results to identify schools and districts that need more support and resources. They identify the schools with the lowest performance in the state, as well as schools with certain groups of students that performed much lower on the test than the rest of the students in that school. These schools receive additional funding and resources from the state to support students and teachers. For example, schools may hire more teachers or tutors or they may purchase additional instructional materials and programs, depending on the needs of their students.

#### **Where Can I Go for More Information?**

- For more information, visit [Education.PA.gov/K-12/Assessment%20and%20Accountability/PSSA/Pages/default.aspx](https://Education.PA.gov/K-12/Assessment%20and%20Accountability/PSSA/Pages/default.aspx)
- To see sample ELA questions, visit [Education.PA.gov/K-12/Assessment%20and%20Accountability/PSSA/Pages/ELAs.aspx](https://Education.PA.gov/K-12/Assessment%20and%20Accountability/PSSA/Pages/ELAs.aspx)
- To see sample math questions, visit [Education.PA.gov/K-12/Assessment%20and%20Accountability/PSSA/Pages/Mathematics.aspx](https://Education.PA.gov/K-12/Assessment%20and%20Accountability/PSSA/Pages/Mathematics.aspx)
- For ideas on how to support your child's learning at home, visit [PTA.org/FamilyGuides](https://PTA.org/FamilyGuides)
- For more information about the Pennsylvania PTA visit [PAPTA.org/](https://PAPTA.org/)

