

Please see below the questions asked during the PSSA Test Coordinators' Training on February 7, 2011 and their answers. The questions and answers are grouped under many topics, and the topics are organized alphabetically below.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Can a Spanish-speaking student “opt” to take the Math and Science tests in Spanish if they are not ELLs?

No. This accommodation is ONLY allowed for ELLs who have been enrolled in U.S. schools for less than 3 years. If they are *not* ELLs, they cannot avail of this accommodation.

First year ELLs – If they do not take Reading, does it count for participation?

No, the reading test does not count for participation.

First year ELLs – Are they allowed Number lines and alphabets?

No. Number lines and alphabets are not allowed for ANY student, including the ELLs, since doing so will compromise the integrity of the test.

Where can we obtain a word-to-word dictionary?

Two possibilities are:

www.bilingualdictionaries.com or www.langenscheidt.com.

If a student is new to the United States and has to take the Math test, can it be translated for him?

In Math and Science test items can be translated *word-for-word* ONLY, without any definition, explanation, and background information etc.

Are School District translators allowed for ELLs?

There are no school *district* translators. Generally, the schools use translators from the local community, BCAs, parent ombudsman etc. The translators should be provided access to the tests they will be translating after signing a non-disclosure agreement (a sample can be found on the Accountability webpage.) This should occur a few days before the test administration. Refer to page 10 of the Accommodation for ELLs at the link

http://www.education.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/testing_accommodations_security/7448

Can a student use a small whiteboard and dry erase marker instead of scratch paper during the math portion? (This is a daily modification in their math class).

Yes, if this accommodation is stated in the student's IEP.

Are there additional accommodations for autistic inclusion students?

All the applicable accommodations for students with IEPs taking the PSSA or PSSA-M are in the Accommodations booklet called “Accommodations Guidelines for Students with IEPs and 504 Plans” at the link given above.

Are the teachers allowed to read the entire Math test to the entire class? Does it include the answer choices?

No, they cannot read the entire math test to the whole class. They can only do so individually and to small groups of students who need this accommodation. Yes, the choices can just be *read* aloud. The test administrator cannot clarify, use alternative vocabulary, or give any hints etc. Refer to page 7 of the “Accommodations for Students Without IEPs and 504 Plans.”

Who can be read the entire math or science test?

Small group (5 students or less with IEPs) of students can be read aloud the entire math or science test. Refer to page 42 of “Accommodations Guidelines for Students with IEPs and 504 Plans.”

What items are on the audio CD?

Complete Math and Science tests are on the audio CD for regular PSSA in English only, for all tested grades. Audio CDs are not available for PSSA-M in these subjects.

Where is the application for audio CDs?

If you need audio CDs in Math or Science, call (1-800-451-7849) or e-mail (pacustomerservice@datarecognitioncorp.com) DRC. After obtaining permission from the PDE, the audio CDs will be sent to you.

ATTEMPT LOGIC

What is the minimum attempt logic? How many questions must be answered?

In order for a student to receive a score in the subject, the student **MUST** attempt at least 5 items in EACH section of the subject, e.g., there are 3 sections in math. For a student to get a math score, he/she should attempt at least 5 questions in each of the 3 sections. If a student completes two sections and leaves the 3rd blank, he/she will not get a score at all.

ATTRIBUTION

Do CARE students who have a home school need to be attributed? Will they be counted for their home school’s AYP?

All students taking the PSSA Reading and Math need to be attributed, including those in CARE. These students will be attributed to their schools of residence.

How is a home (transferred) student working with a Cyber School attributed and tested?

It is the responsibility of the cyber school to test its students. The students will be attributed to the cyber school.

If a student is in our Charter LEA on December 1st, 2010, and moves to another Charter, will he/she ever be counted towards a LEA’s AYP performance? If so, the new or old LEA?

The student’s performance will not be counted in either of the charter’s AYP. However, his/her participation will be counted in the new charter school’s AYP, since he/she was there during the testing window.

CALCULATOR USE

Are 3rd graders allowed to use calculators during the test?

No, 3rd graders are NOT allowed to use the calculator during the entire math test.

Are calculators allowed in the science test?

No, calculators are NOT allowed in the science test for any grade.

CLASSROOM DISPLAYS

What is allowed to be displayed in the classroom?

- (a) PDE's General Description of Scoring Guidelines in mathematics, reading, science, and writing (found in the Appendix B of the Test Coordinators' Handbook)
- (b) The formula sheets (in English and Spanish) for grades 7, 8, and 11 on the PDE website, under Math Resources

[http://www.education.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/pennsylvania_system_of_school_assessment_\(pssa\)/8757/resource_materials/507610](http://www.education.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/pennsylvania_system_of_school_assessment_(pssa)/8757/resource_materials/507610)

- (c) The Domain Scoring Guide in Writing

Everything else should be removed or covered with non-transparent material.

Should the materials be covered for all the subjects, and how long?

The materials should be covered for the ENTIRE testing window, March 14-April 15.

COMMUNICATION DEVICES

Can students use the calculator feature in their communication devices (such as cell phones, iphones etc.) during testing?

This is strictly prohibited. Students should NOT have access to these devices during testing.

HIGHLIGHTERS, PENCILS, AND GRAPH PAPER ETC.

What are the guidelines for using highlighters?

Students respond directly in the test booklet in reading/math in the 3rd grade, writing in grades 5, 8, and 11, and science in the 11th grade. In these booklets students must avoid; (a) highlighting the bubbles, (b) open-ended areas, and the (c) black marks along the edges of the paper. If the highlighter strays over the answer bubble, the item cannot be scored correctly. In the grades and subjects where the test and answer booklets are separate, any part of the test booklet can be highlighted and marked.

Can the bubbles be completed with a pen?

Never. Only a #2 pencil can be used to fill-in the bubbles. Bubbles filled-in with a pen cannot be scored.

Can you use graph paper as scratch?

Yes, you can.

HOMEBOUND STUDENTS

Do homebound students need to be assessed? With PASA? With PSSA?

Yes homebound students, in the PSSA/PASA tested grades, MUST be assessed. If they qualify for PASA, they will be assessed with PASA. If they do not qualify for PASA, they will be assessed with PSSA or PSSA-M.

Who tests the homebound students? Do they come in to school or does the homebound teacher go to the house?

Homebound students MUST be tested. If they can come to the school for testing, they will be tested in the school. If they cannot come to the school, the homebound teacher will sign the confidentiality agreement, take the testing materials home, test the student in his/her presence (in multiple sessions, as needed), and submit the materials to the testing coordinator upon completion.

HOME SCHOOLED STUDENTS

Does the school need to reach out to the parent of a home schooled student if the parent doesn't contact the school requesting the child be tested?

The parent must contact the school, if he/she desires their student to be tested. The school does not need to contact the parent.

Do home schooled students have a PA Secure ID #?

No, unless traditional school provides some part of the education, or the child was enrolled in a school prior to being home-schooled.

PARENTAL NOTIFICATION

Do we have to notify the parents of their option to view the tests or do they already know?

Parents may not know about this option. The schools have to inform the parents. There is a parent FAQ in the Test Coordinator's Handbook (pages 43-44) that mentions this. Schools can send the FAQ home to parents. The translations of the FAQ in 8 languages are also available on the SDP Home page (parent tab) and the Office of Accountability webpage (<http://webgui.phila.k12.pa.us/offices/a/accountability/>)

PASA RELATED QUESTIONS

How do I know which students will be taking the PASA?

To be eligible for PASA, the students must meet each one of the 6 criteria listed on page 11 of the Handbook for Testing Coordinators and also on the PASA website (www.pasaassessment.org/AdminElig.jsp) The decision is made by the student's IEP team. The Sp. Ed. Liason (SEL) at the school should have this information. PASA eligible students are, generally, in the low incidence programs.

When will we be notified if a student is taking PASA?

Students who are taking PASA have already been identified. Their teachers, who will be testing them, have received the testing materials. You will not be notified about these students. However, you can find out about them from the Sp. Ed. Liason (SEL) at your school. The SELs are responsible for coordinating PASA administration.

Can I still order the PASA tests?

Yes, call 412-648-7082. The PASA testing window began on February 14, therefore it must be done soon.

A student recently transferred into our school, and his/her IEP says “PASA.” What do I need to do? We have never given PASA.

The Sp.Ed. teacher of the student must complete an enrollment form for the student and checklists in reading and math, if applicable. Contact the SEL at your school, or the Case Manager at the Academic Division, or Uma Jayaraman (215-400-6546) for these forms.

Since the February 2nd PD was cancelled, will there be an opportunity for teachers to be trained to administer the PASA tests?

The Office of Specialized Services (OSIS) Case Managers at the Academic Divisions (ADs) are planning to conduct the trainings at the ADs . Contact the Case manager of your AD or Russell Washington (ruwashington@philasd.org) to inquire about the training for your school’s low incidence teachers who will be administering the test.

Is it the responsibility of the school to order the PASA tests?

Yes, it is the responsibility of the teacher of the student (sometimes the SEL at the school) to fill out the enrollment form for every student to be tested with PASA. For new students, the Math/Reading checklists also need to be completed. The completed forms are sent to bjohnson@pitt.edu. Then, they receive the testing materials.

PA. SECURE ID

How long does it take to create a new state ID #?

Generally, within a week of enrollment, the new student receives a state ID. It should appear on the student page in the School Computer Network (SCN.) next to his/her school district ID. This ID stays with the student till they graduate from high school.

PENCILS AND PACKING TAPE

This year will we get pencils in time for the PSSA?

Yes, pencils and a packing tape have been sent to schools via PONY to arrive *before* the PSSA testing window.

PSSA-MODIFIED

What percent of Philadelphia students took the PSSA-M last year? Per grade cluster? (3-5, 6-8, 9-11)

Approximately 700 students, so about 1% of the district and of these a small percentage was proficient.

What determines (eligibility for) a modified test? Who determines if a student takes the PSSA-M? Who has the list of these students?

Students need to meet each of the 4 criteria to be eligible for the modified test. It is only for students with IEPs, who are not eligible for PASA, have consistently scored Below basic or low Basic in PSSA, and have persistent difficulty in accessing grade level instruction. The decision regarding the appropriateness of this test is made on an individual basis for each subject by the IEP team. The SEL at the school is likely to have the list.

If I’d like more modified assessments, can I request them? Yes, through the Additional Materials Request Form in the back of the Test Coordinator’s Handbook. Test coordinators have

already received this handbook in the first shipment of testing materials. Fax the form with your order at the number given in the form.

I now have 5 students whom the SEL tells me need to take the modified PSSA. She didn't know this in the fall. How do I sign them up?

There is no need to sign-up. Just order the test as described above.

Who should take the PSSA-M? All LS? What are pros and cons of them taking the modified tests?

See the answer to the question above regarding PSSA-M eligibility.

Pros: It is an easier test (less # of items, easier language, scaffolded, large font etc.)

Cons: If the proficiency cap in the grade band exceeds 2% at the district level, the excess students have to be counted as non-proficient and these will be counted as non-proficient at the school level also, possibly impacting the school's AYP negatively.

How does it look on subgroup reporting?

PSSA-M students will be part of the IEP subgroup, overall, their racial/ethnic sub group, and economic disadvantage (if applicable.)

Can the students taking PSSA and PSSA-M be in the same room to hear instructions? Or are there different instructions for PSSA-M?

The instructions are completely different, also the test booklets and the number of sections, e.g., there are two sections in PSSA-M, student responds in the test booklet etc. Therefore, the PSSA and PSSA-M testing should be in different settings.

Why would the state spend a considerable sum of money to design the PSSA-M, and then not permit ALL students with IEPs to take it, without penalty? You must be aware of the frustration these students face during PSSA.

Federal requirement is that ONLY 2% of proficient scores at the district level can come from those taking PSSA-M. This results in limiting the number of eligible sp. ed. students (13% of the student population is sp. ed.)

Can you explain how the PSSA-M result is used in the AYP calculation?

NCLB requires that only 2% of proficient scores at the district level, in grade bands 3-5, 6-8, and 11, be contributed by PSSA-M. If *over* 2% of students taking PSSA-M in reading or math in any of these grade bands are proficient, the excess students MUST be counted as 'non-proficient' for the purpose of district's AYP calculation. However, the students designated as 'non-proficient' (by the Office of Accountability), will also count as non-proficient for the school's AYP calculation. This has the potential of adversely affecting the attainment of AYP for certain schools.

If a student took the modified test last year, do they have to take it again this year?

They do not *have* to take it. They can take the PSSA-M, or PSSA, or PASA this year. The IEP team makes the decision regarding the most appropriate test every year.

If a student got Proficient on the regular PSSA, can they take the modified this year if they are not performing well on the benchmarks and predictive?

NO. PSSA-M is for students with IEPs who have consistently scored Below Basic or low Basic on PSSA in the past.

Do we get less credit for PSSA-M?

No, schools do not get less credit for PSSA-M. PSSA-M counts the same as regular PSSA, e.g., a proficient score on PSSA-M is as good as a proficient score on the regular PSSA.

Do you offer 4th grade modified Science?

No, Modified Science test is available only in grades 8 and 11.

PSSA MONITORING

Is the monitoring policy this year as in the past, with one monitor, one session, in one class only?

The district's monitoring policy will be the same as in previous years. The monitors are asked to attend *at least* one session per visit. However, they *can* attend multiple testing sessions, if they choose to.

SCHEDULING

Can different classes in the same grade take the tests at different times?

For example: Math Part 1

Grade 6, Room A – 9:30-11:00

Grade 6, Room B – 12:00-3:00

Yes it can be done, but it is NOT recommended for obvious reason—The students in the two classes may communicate about the test. However, if this is the only way to ensure that all the students have access to the available resources, e.g., calculators, or other compelling reasons, it can be done.

If a student misses a section (say section #2), can he take section #3 with his class and then complete #2 during make-ups?

Yes, this is how make-ups should occur.

SECURITY CODE, LABELS, and BUBBLING

What is the best way to inventory materials? If you don't match booklets by security code, how do you know whose/which booklet is missing?

Yes, match the security code for security/inventory purposes. It is not helpful for testing purposes. For testing purposes, the forms of test and answer booklets must be matched.

Do we put "Do Not Score" labels on unused answer booklets or simply send them back to DRC unlabeled?

Do not place ANY labels on unused booklets. Only if a test/answer booklet was marked (used) and should not be scored (e.g., the student left the school), place a "Do Not Score" label. Then, send this booklet with the scorable materials.

Can you use a student precode label if the grade is incorrect?

Yes, reported grade comes from the grade level of the booklet. As long as the PA secure ID #, school, and student name are correct on the label, it can be used even with incorrect grade. However, you **MUST** use the correct grade level test and answer *booklets*.

If a student is new to the United States, do I put the precode label on the Reading test and is there an accommodation bubble to fill in?

For ELLs who enrolled in the school after May 7, 2010, affix the label on the reading/math answer booklet and fill the 1st bubble in #6 on page 2.

Are the fill in bubbles left justified or right justified?

They are left justified, but DRC's scoring system will justify accordingly.

SORTING THE TEST BOOKLETS

Should we keep all "M" booklets together or integrate and send Modified and Regular tests together?

There is no need to sort within the scorable booklets. All scorable materials can be mixed together, i.e. Modified scorables can be mixed with regular scorables of all grades and subjects. Similarly, there is no need to sort among the non-scorables. However, all the scorables should be separate from all the non-scorables.

SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

What if a student is pregnant? Is this considered a medical emergency? How do we handle kids on maternity leave?

It is treated as a homebound situation. The school will send the test home with the homebound teacher/responsible adult and have the student tested (see the 'homebound' section in this Q & A), unless there is a true emergency. Then call the PDE or the Office of Accountability, describe the situation, and a decision will be made.

We have a student who just returned to school after being out due to a brain injury. She has not been here this year at all. She returned on 2/4/11. She was in 6th grade and we moved her to 5th, so this is her second year in 5th grade. What test should she take?

She should take the test of the grade she is in, currently, i.e. 5th grade.

Should hospitalized students be tested or not? And if tested, does the SEL go to the hospital?

Hospitalized students are to be tested, unless their condition is so severe that it cannot be done. In that case, call the Office of Accountability or PDE and describe the condition. A determination will be made then. For the testing of hospitalized students follow the same procedure as for the homebound students described above.

A 3rd grade student has been placed in Horsham Clinic for Suicide Attempt since December 1, 2010. Is this considered a medical emergency? If not, who tests the child?

No, this is not considered a medical emergency. Horsham Clinic staff will test the child.

If a student enrolled in your school has been placed by the court in an alternative setting, what should be done about testing? What about his/her attribution?

If a student is court or agency placed, and has an IEP, he/she MUST be tested. Also, for such students, the bubble “Student is Court/Agency Placed” under “Other Assessment Information” on the 2nd page of answer booklet MUST be completed, since this information is not captured in the student label. Court/Agency placed students are attributed to the state.

Can TSS workers stay in the classroom?

Yes, he/she can stay in the classroom during testing.

STUDENT TRANSFERS

Will the school district freeze transfers during the PSSA?

No, the transfers cannot be frozen during the PSSA.

TEST ADMINISTRATOR QUALIFICATION

Does the test administrator need to be a certified teacher? (Ex: substitutes)

Not necessarily. The test administrator must be a district employee who had been trained in the policies and procedures of the PSSA.

It was stated that test administrators must be a staff member. Does this mean that a community volunteer who has worked closely all year with both the teacher and the students may not read the math questions to a small group of students who need the math test read to them?

The test administrators must be employees of the school district.

TESTING IN ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS

If there is a student enrolled in the CARE program or Boone and they are still on our rolls, does the CARE/Boone issue the PSSA or should we send the materials?

All the alternative sites, such as CARE and Boone, will be receiving their own materials directly at their locations. There is no need for schools to send any testing materials to the alternative sites.

Who is testing CARE students? The CARE teachers or the SEL?

CARE teachers, not the SELs, will test their students.

TIMELINE & SHIPPING

When can we expect testing materials to ship to schools? Will direction manuals be in a separate shipment?

The first shipment of non-secure materials (test administrator’s manual, test coordinator’s handbook etc.) has arrived in schools in the week of February 14. The second shipment of secure materials (test booklets, answer booklets etc.) will arrive in schools in the week of February 28, 2011.

Will the boxes sent to schools be marked “Science,” “Reading,” “Writing,” and “Math”?

No, the boxes will not be marked by the subject. However, within the boxes, the materials will be grouped by subject, following the DRC’s shipping procedures.

We're supposed to use the boxes in which the materials are shipped. There are never enough boxes to return materials because less space is needed to return answer sheets than test booklets. Please send extra boxes or pack the boxes less full.

You can order additional empty boxes using the Additional Materials request form.

USING A SCRIBE AND TRANSCRIBING THE TEST

What is the role of a scribe?

The role of the scribe is to write the *dictated* response of the student, no more and no less.

Is the use of a scribe not allowed in any part of the PSSA?

The use of scribe is not allowed in responding to the writing essay prompts.

What does a transcriber do?

A transcriber copies a student's *illegible or typed* response, without making any changes, into an answer booklet.

If a student is having their answer transcribed because of illegibility, does the student's copy have to go along with the test?

No. If the student (with illegible handwriting) wrote in an answer booklet, place a 'Do Not Score' label on the student's answer booklet and send with non-scorables. The *transcribed answer booklet (of the same form as the one the student wrote in)*, with appropriate label or bubbled-in information, must be sent with the scorables.

We have students who have transcription in their IEPs. Do they need a special booklet? They are not blind. Does it include the LS students?

No, they do not need a special booklet. Use of a scribe is an accommodation available to *all* the students (including LS) who have illegible handwriting or are unable to write (e.g., due to a fractured writing hand). See page 6 of "Accommodations for Students Without IEPs and 504 Plans (link under 'Accommodations' of this Q & A.)" Students can bubble-in (or point to) the multiple-choice responses in the answer booklet and write the response to open-ended questions on a separate sheet of paper that is transcribed on to the answer booklet by the test administrator. Students can review and edit what the scribe has written.

Can any information be transcribed for a student if it's in their IEP?

Yes, check pages 36-37 of the booklet "Accommodation for Students with IEPs and 504 Plans."

If you have any questions, please contact

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