A Parent Guide to the Pennsylvania Alternate System of Assessment



Frequently Asked Questions

What is the PASA?

The Pennsylvania Alternate System of Assessment (PASA) is a statewide alternate assessment designed for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who are unable to participate meaningfully in the Pennsylvania State Assessment System (PSSA) or Keystone Exams, even with accommodations. The PASA is a series of individually administered image-based, multiple-choice test items given by the child's teacher or another certified test administrator who knows the student well. Test administration can be adapted so that students with the most significant cognitive disabilities can participate in the assessment. There are two tiers of the PASA available at each grade, and each tier varies in the level of support provided within the question and answer choices.

What content is assessed on the PASA?

The Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that all students with disabilities have access to the general education curriculum. IDEA also requires states to provide an alternate assessment for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities for whom the general assessment, even with accommodations, is not appropriate. Like the PSSA, the PASA is aligned to grade level Pennsylvania Core Standards in mathematics and English language arts and the Pennsylvania Academic Standards in science. Standards are broad, therefore the PSSA assesses more precise knowledge and skills, known as eligible content. The PASA assesses knowledge and skills referred to as alternate eligible content or AEC. In Pennsylvania, stakeholders including parents, teachers, and administrators identified the AEC. AEC is eligible content that has been prioritized and reduced in depth, breadth, and complexity. The number of AEC may vary by grade and Pennsylvania Core/ Academic Standard and will not be a one-to-one match to every PSSA eligible content. The AEC represents the highest level of achievement for students on the PASA, but it can be reduced further for greater access through a process known as essentialization. The AEC has received Pennsylvania State Board approval.

Who takes the PASA?

Students who are in the identified tested grades participate in the PASA. Like the general assessment or PSSA, the PASA is administered in grades 3 through 8 and 11 for English, language arts, and math. The PASA science is taken in grades 4, 8, and 11. Students must also be deemed eligible to participate in the PASA by the individualized education program (IEP) team in accordance with the PASA eligibility criteria. The answer must be "YES" to each of the six eligibility criteria in order for a student to take the PASA:

- Will the student be in grade 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, or 11 by September 1st of the school year during which the IEP will be operative?
- Does the student have significant cognitive disabilities? Pennsylvania defines significant cognitive disabilities as pervasive and global in nature, affecting student learning in all academic content areas, as well as adaptive behaviors and functional skills across life domains.
- Does the student require intensive, direct, and repeated instruction in order to learn and generalize academic, functional, and adaptive behavior skills across multiple settings?
- Does the student require extensive adaptation and support in order to perform and/or participate meaningfully and productively in the everyday life activities of integrated school, home, community, and work environments?
- Does the student require substantial modifications to the general education curriculum?
- Does the student's participation in the general curriculum differ substantially in form and/or substance from that of most other students? Students found eligible to take the PASA must have measurable annual goals **and** short-term objectives reflected in the IEP.

Who decides whether my child will take the PASA?

The parent is a key member of the IEP team in making the eligibility determination for the PASA. The IEP team decides which state assessment will be most appropriate for the child. The IEP team must consider the six PASA eligibility criteria and answer "YES" to each in order for the child to take the PASA. The IEP team also documents in the IEP any accommodations the child may need on state and local assessments .

Can the IEP team exempt or opt a student out of taking the PASA?

No. All students must be assessed under federal requirements for accountability purposes. Students with IEPs are assessed through either the PSSAs, Keystones, or the PASA as determined by their IEP team. Per Pennsylvania School Code, a parent can request to have their child exempted or opted out of the state assessment if they feel the assessment conflicts with their religious beliefs. However, this not an IEP team decision. If a parent feels the state assessment is in conflict with their religious beliefs, they must follow the process for religious exemption with school administrators. In cases of religious exemptions, the IEP team still addresses the state assessment section of the IEP as they would if the child were taking the test. The child is still enrolled in the

PASA online test enrollment system by the school for accountability purposes. Any student who is exempted by their parent/guardian from a state assessment due to religious reasons is included in the district's overall participation rate and will negatively impact the rate.

If my child is found eligible to take the PASA, will they take it every tested year thereafter?

No. PASA eligibility determinations are made annually as part of the IEP team meeting. Changes in eligibility decisions can be made through an IEP team meeting or revision at any time. The most current IEP should reflect whether the student takes the general state assessment or the PASA. If the student is deemed eligible by the IEP team to take the PASA, the student must take the PASA for all tested subjects. It is not permissible to take the PSSA/Keystone in one subject and the PASA in another subject during the same tested year.

What can my child expect on the day(s) of testing?

The PASA is administered in a one-to-one setting. Typically, the student's special education teacher or a familiar service provider gives the test. The Bureau of Special Education recommends that testing occur in a setting that is familiar to the student. Each tested subject area contains about 30 multiple choice questions that are read aloud with three answer choices given to the student in picture or word format. The student can give their responses in various ways. For example, if the student is not able to say or point to the answer choice they would like, they may use an assistive technology device if appropriate. The student may be administered all questions at one time or a few questions over time based upon individual needs. The student may receive an additional prompt by the test administrator to try to answer the question correctly.

Why is video recording necessary?

The PASA is a highly individualized, tiered, one-on-one performance-based assessment. Due to the design of the assessment, the student's answer choices are entered by the test administrator into the PASA computer system known as the PASA digital system. The student's performance is video recorded and uploaded to the secure PASA digital system. The video of the assessment confirms that test administration procedures were followed and student responses were entered accurately into the digital system.

On behalf of the Pennsylvania Department of Education, Bureau of Special Education, the PASA developer holds an annual scoring and validation conference in the spring. Certified teachers from across the state come together to score and validate the assessments. These teachers receive specialized training regarding scoring and confidentiality from the University of Pittsburgh PASA team. Once the scoring is complete, the University of Pittsburgh PASA vendor maintains security of the videos in accordance with state records retention policies.

How are my child's PASA scores used?

Performance on all state assessments, including the PASA, is one way for schools, teachers, and parents to gauge how students and schools are performing in regard to proficiency of the academic standards. Assessment results are one measure that IEP teams may consider when determining future academic instructional needs. Because the PASA is designed for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, the scores provide a better representation of how the child is performing based against grade-level standards and alternate eligible content that are reduced in depth, breadth, and complexity.

As a parent, you will receive an individual score report for your child after your child takes the assessment. The PASA is typically administered in the spring of each school year, with the final score reports to be delivered to parents in the Fall of the following school year. A parent *Guide to Student Score Reports* can be accessed on the PASA digital website at www.pasaassessment.org.

How do English Learner students participate in the PASA?

Students in their first year in the United States are not required to participate in state assessments for English language arts. They are, however, required to participate in the math and science assessments. This includes the PASA. For any language other than English, an interpreter may be used to present the PASA during the first three years that a student is categorized as an EL (English Learner) in U.S. schools.

A resource for parents, known as the *Guide to Student Score Reports*, is available in Spanish. Additional language translations are available upon request.

What if my child repeats a grade level? Will my child take the PASA again for that grade?

All students in the tested grade level must participate in the state assessment. If the student is repeating a year in a tested grade level, the student must participate in the state assessment again.

Will my child's performance on the PASA drive educational placement decisions for a more or less restrictive setting?

No. The purpose of the PASA is not to make educational placement recommendations. Rather, the purpose of the test is to provide schools, teachers, and parents with a common measure to gauge how students and schools are performing in regard to proficiency of the academic standards. Performance on the PASA is one measure that the IEP team may use when planning instruction aligned to grade-level standards and alternate eligible content. The test results represent merely a snapshot in time of how the child is performing. Multiple data sources should be utilized by the IEP team to make instructional decisions.

Can my child receive a regular diploma if they participate in the PASA?

Yes. Students with disabilities can graduate with a regular high school diploma in Pennsylvania by either meeting the standard requirements set forth by the state, or by meeting the goals set forth in their IEP. Pennsylvania does not issue an alternate diploma for students who graduate based on IEP goals aligned to alternate eligible content, as done in some other states.

Please contact your child's teacher or school team for more information. Additional resources can be found on the following websites:

- Pennsylvania Department of Education:
  https://www.education.pa.gov/K-12/Special%20Education/Pages/PA-Alternate-System-of-Assessment.aspx
- PASA Digital:
  http://www.pasaassessment.org
- Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network:
  https://www.pattan.net/disabilities/intellectual-disabilities/statewide-assessments-and-accountability/pasa/

The Bureau of Special Education encourages schools and service providers to make this document available to parents. IEP teams may utilize the document as a resource when making PASA eligibility determination decisions. A Spanish version of this document is available.

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

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