



Continued Success with Online Testing

Last spring, all Pennsylvania LEAs successfully transitioned to the online platform for the administration of the PSSA and/or Keystone Exams. The dedication of your technology staff, assessment coordinators, and test administrators was instrumental in the success of this transition. To ensure continued success with online testing, all LEAs should again follow the recommended procedures so that each school and student is fully prepared to interact with the online tests.

The best way to ensure your students are comfortable with online testing is to have them engage with the online platform before the summative assessments. One way to provide your students, teachers, and technology staff with that valuable experience is by administering CDT or Firefly. Both assessments utilize the same platform that is used for the PSSA and Keystone Exams. Also, administering CDT or Firefly in a manner consistent with spring testing will give you an opportunity to confirm that your technical configurations and bandwidth are ready to support the full spring test population.

All LEAs must also ensure that their students are provided access to the Online Tools Training (OTT) and Online Tutorials prior to the spring administration. These resources are an essential piece of preparing students for online testing. In addition to these hands-on opportunities, DRC has a wide array of technology resources available on the DRC INSIGHT Portal, as well as online administration training on the PSA Assessments site:

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

Legacy Keystone Biology Testing

All students who are placed in a Biology test session for the 2026-2027 administrations will receive the new, STEELS-aligned Biology Exam. This test is for all first-time testers and re-testers from the Spring 2026 administration. For students who took the Biology exam before spring 2026, the former ("Legacy") Biology test will be available as an accommodation for re-testers who are attempting to improve their Biology best-score-to-date. The Legacy Biology test is also appropriate for students who took the Legacy test as an accommodation in spring 2026.

Legacy Biology scores cannot be combined with the new Biology test for the calculation of best scores. If a student moves from the Legacy test to the new Biology test, the student's best score calculation will be based on the new Biology test only.

If you plan to administer the Legacy Biology test to a student who is re-taking a Legacy test (i.e., a test taken before spring 2026), you must select the legacy accommodation prior to printing the student's test ticket. The legacy accommodation is the only means by which a student can access the Legacy Biology test. The legacy test is available online and with all accommodated forms.

DRC INSIGHT System Requirements

System requirements are available on the DRC INSIGHT Portal under the Knowledge Hub section. Use this link to access the DRC Knowledge Hub: <https://khub.drccdirect.com/drc-insight-supported-operating-system-versions>

Contact DRC PA Customer Service 1-800-451-7849

Email: PAcustomerservice@datarecognitioncorp.com

DRC INSIGHT Portal: pa.drccdirect.com

PSA Assessments Site: sites.google.com/datarecognitioncorp.com/psa-assessments/home

Firefly Opens Soon!

Last year, the Firefly program was expanded to include a full suite of interactive reports and predictions for student performance on the spring assessments. As a result, more than 1,347,000 Firefly tests were administered across the Commonwealth! This year, Firefly will be expanded to include predictions and Instructional Supports for the Science and Biology tests and will continue to be the only benchmark assessment program that is fully aligned to Pennsylvania's assessment standards.

The Firefly program provides schools with free, high-quality benchmark assessments that are designed specifically for Pennsylvania and measure the same knowledge and skills as the PSSA and Keystone Exams. The computer-adaptive assessments are available for all subjects that are assessed on the PSSA and Keystone Exams.

Test Setup for the 2026-2027 Firefly administration opened on September 21, and testing can begin on October 5. The 2026-27 Firefly will include three seasons, and students can take a Firefly test up to three times (either within or across seasons). All schools can administer Firefly, and participation is as simple as adding students and test sessions in the DRC INSIGHT Portal.

Additional information about PA Firefly can be found on PDE's website, the DRC INSIGHT Portal, and DRC's resources and training site (sites.google.com/datarecognitioncorp.com/psa-assessments/home).

Managing Pre-Populated Test Sessions

As a result of a collaborative effort with PDE, DRC was able for the first time to use PIMS data to pre-populate online test sessions for last spring's PSSA and Keystone Exams. The automated test sessions were well received by the LEAs, and the practice will continue for the 2026-2027 assessments, beginning with the Winter Keystone Exams.

The "Test Sessions" files will utilize data that is submitted to PIMS in field 212 (for PSSA) or field 215 (Keystone Exams), along with Grade (field 10), and anything submitted in Home Room (field 13). Test Session names will be a combination of Home Room, Assessment, and Grade.

The pre-populated test sessions can be edited, deleted, or replaced if schools prefer to create test sessions with different student configurations. For example, if a school plans to administer the tests in specific groups for logistical or technological reasons, rather than the homerooms identified in PIMS, the school can overwrite the pre-populated test sessions or add new ones through the Multiple Test Sessions upload process in the DRC INSIGHT Portal. This will move the students out of the pre-populated test sessions and into test sessions that meet the school's testing plans.

Classroom Diagnostic Tools (CDT) Science Tests Coming Soon

Last year, the CDT Science and Biology tests and reporting were updated to offer students their first opportunity to interact with STEELS-aligned science tests (Science, Technology & Engineering, Environmental Literacy & Sustainability). In mid-October, the science tests will be released for 2026-2027 with updated reporting that reflects the cut scores recently adopted by the Pennsylvania State Board of Education, which will again offer schools an early opportunity to gauge student mastery of STEELS content.

The updated science tests can be administered as full tests or Diagnostic Category tests and will provide the full spectrum of reporting, including links to STEELS-aligned support materials and sample items. The CDT is a powerful, no-cost solution for all Pennsylvania schools that are looking for opportunities for students to engage with STEELS content!

Maintaining Accurate Contact Information

The transition to statewide online testing has eliminated the need for a traditional enrollment system; however, sites are still responsible for maintaining their contact information for the shipment of paper manuals and for the receipt of correspondence from PDE and DRC. All District Assessment Coordinators are expected to access the “Contacts/Testing Dates” page within the DRC INSIGHT Portal to review and update the Assessment Coordinator, Reporting Contact, and Technology Coordinator for their districts and schools.

The contact information provided for the district and schools will be used for all 2026-2027 assessments. If a new DAC has been assigned to an LEA, DRC Customer Service must be contacted to grant access to the new role. The contact update system is available throughout the entire school year for DACs to make any changes for district or school personnel. If you have questions about managing contact information, please refer to the PSA Assessments training site for additional information: sites.google.com/datarecognitioncorp.com/psa-assessments/home.

Manuals and Paper Accommodations

Schools will continue to receive paper copies of the *Handbook for Assessment Coordinators* and the *Directions for Administration* manuals this winter and spring. These manuals, along with printed reference materials, will be shipped automatically, and additional copies can be ordered via the Additional Materials Ordering system.

The only paper *secure materials* available to schools for the 2026-2027 assessments will be large print and Braille booklets. These accommodated materials will need to be ordered exclusively via the Additional Materials Ordering system. Because an enrollment system is no longer needed for online administrations, schools will not be asked to provide projected large print and Braille needs. Instead, schools will place their orders based on the needs identified prior to test administration.

District Assessment Coordinators may begin placing orders for large print and Braille booklets at the same time Test Setup opens for each assessment. Requests for secure paper materials will be processed so that the materials arrive no sooner than two weeks prior to an assessment, regardless of when the request was submitted.

Students who participate in an assessment using a large print or Braille booklet will need to have their responses fully transcribed into the online test engine. Schools will be required to place these students into online test sessions with the appropriate accommodation selected. LEAs will be responsible for handling and securely destroying the large print and Braille booklets after transcription is complete.

Print On Demand Materials

Students whose IEP/504 plans require paper testing on a standard form will need to be provided a Print on Demand (POD) version of the test. The POD tests are available in both English and Spanish. This accommodation will require local printing of the test form and full transcription of student responses into the online test engine.

Only a very small percentage of students will need this test accommodation. It is not an option for students who simply prefer a paper-and-pencil form. Schools must submit a ‘Unique Accommodation Assurance’ to PDE prior to selecting the POD accommodation for a student.

District or School Assessment Coordinators are responsible for accessing the Print on Demand guidance for students who qualify for this unique accommodation. The guidance documents are available on both PDE’s website and the DRC INSIGHT Portal. The documents provide DACs, SACs, and Test Administrators the information needed to access, administer, and transcribe a POD test. Like large print and Braille forms, LEAs are responsible for handling and securely destroying the Print on Demand forms after transcription is complete.

2026-2027 IMPORTANT DATES

2026-2027 Winter Keystone

Testing Dates Collection Window	October 15-21, 2026
Manuals delivered, Test Setup Available, and Additional Materials Opens	November 9, 2026
Wave 1 Testing Window	December 7-18, 2026
Wave 2 Testing Window	January 4-15, 2027
Match to Master Window	February 15-18, 2027
Winter Keystone Student Data Files posted	March 5, 2027

2027 PSSA

Testing Dates Collection Window	February 8-19, 2027
Manuals delivered, Test Setup Available, and Additional Materials Opens	March 29, 2027
PSSA Testing Window ELA	April 26-30, 2027
PSSA Testing Window Math, Science, Make-ups	May 3-7, 2027
PSSA Testing Window Math, Science, Make-ups (Optional)	May 10-14, 2027
Grades 3-8 Attributions Window	June 21-25, 2027
PSSA Student Data Files posted	June 21, 2027
Grade 11 Attributions Window	July 22-26, 2027
Accountability District Student Data Files	August 17, 2027

2027 Spring Keystone Exams

Testing Dates Collection Window	March 15-26, 2027
Manuals delivered, Test Setup Available, and Additional Materials Opens	April 19, 2027
Spring Keystone Testing Window	May 17-28, 2027
Spring Keystone Match to Master Window	June 25-29, 2027
Spring Keystone Student Data Files posted	July 19, 2027

Device Support Awareness

Each release of the DRC INSIGHT online testing system is configured to work within the security and functionality features of the newest operating systems. LEAs should ensure ALL devices are running on the most current version of the device's operating system. If testing devices are running on "obsolete" operating systems, the device will not be able to deliver the online tests with the needed level of functionality to provide the expected student test experience or the level of security the assessments demand. The DRC INSIGHT system requirements and other documentation related to device support are readily available within the DRC INSIGHT Portal.

Testing Devices and Software

If supportive software has been added to the devices on which your students will take the state assessments, 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. 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.

Resources and Training Google Site

The most frequently accessed resource and training materials are now on a Google site. This site supplements what is already available to you on the DRC INSIGHT Portal, and includes training videos as well as a FAQ section. The site is located at:

sites.google.com/datarecognitioncorp.com/psa-assessments/home or scan the QR code.

