

# A BIG WIN FOR PENNSYLVANIA STUDENTS

## Pennsylvania Core Standards



In 2013, the Pennsylvania State Board of Education adopted new math and English language arts standards that are higher, clearer, and more focused on the skills that matter most. These college- and career-ready standards will equip our students with the skills they need to graduate high school prepared for success as 21st century learners.

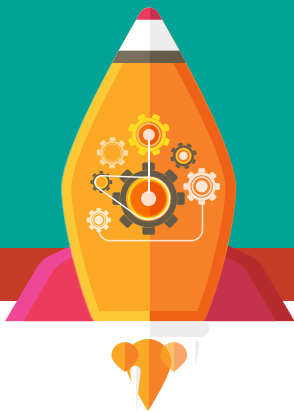
Pennsylvania's previous academic standards were not up to par, lacking nearly 50% of what experts consider the most essential content. In the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's 2007 *Leaders and Laggards* report, the old standards received a 'D' for lack of rigor. On the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), also known as the Nation's Report Card, fewer than half of Pennsylvania students in every grade were proficient in reading and math. Although 75% of eighth grade students were proficient on the state math test, only 40% were proficient on a more rigorous international math assessment, Trends in International Math Science Study, commonly referred to as TIMSS.

Pennsylvania's Proficiency Rates on the Nation's Report Card

Year	4th Math	4th Reading	8th Math	8th Reading
2011	48%	41%	39%	38%
2013	44%	40%	42%	42%

Our students were not graduating high school prepared for the future, and the results were costly. Approximately 40% of first-year community college students had to pay for and enroll in at least one remedial course, receiving no academic credit toward graduation. Twenty percent of freshman at state public four-year universities needed remediation because they lacked the skills to complete college-level work. With the adoption of higher standards, Pennsylvania is one step closer to ensuring that all students graduate high school ready for college-level work.

These updated standards will also help strengthen the pipeline of talent into Pennsylvania businesses. Overall, 75% of jobs in Pennsylvania require education beyond high school. Twenty-five percent require at least a four-year degree, and 50% are considered "gold-collar jobs" that require a level of education less than a bachelor's degree. In a survey of business owners, 80% agreed that a high school diploma does not provide students with the skills they need for the workforce. By raising the bar, Pennsylvanians can be confident that our students are challenged by real-life expectations and will be qualified to meet employer expectations to fill the jobs of the future.



# A BIG WIN FOR PENNSYLVANIA STUDENTS

## Better Standards Deserve Better Assessments

Teachers across Pennsylvania have been hard at work implementing the standards. It has been a significant undertaking involving countless hours participating in professional development, aligning curricula and instructional materials, and learning strategies to engage students at a deeper level than ever before.

The next phase of this work is to implement assessments in Pennsylvania that are more meaningful to students, teachers, and parents. They must measure the problem-solving and critical thinking skills that parents, teachers, business leaders, and higher education leaders know our students need to be successful. Our current state tests cannot evaluate this level of learning.

Putting better assessments in place is not enough, however. They need to be part of a larger system of accountability that supports student achievement and holds schools accountable for successfully teaching the content outlined in the standards. As taxpayers and citizens of Pennsylvania, we need to be confident that the funds we invest in our schools are well spent and provide our children with the high-quality education they deserve. When students need to enroll in remedial courses, it means that their high school diploma is not an accurate assurance of content mastery. This comes with substantial costs both to taxpayers and to the students themselves, who pay more tuition and are less likely to graduate. At the heart of accountability is the need to ensure that all students across the state are receiving the same high-quality education, no matter the district they live in or the school they attend.

Meaningful tests serve as school-wide academic checkups that can identify struggling students and schools in need of extra support and interventions. Much like we schedule regular doctor appointments to identify and treat our health concerns, we use assessments to identify areas where students are struggling so we can provide them with the help they need to improve. Teachers are the most capable of identifying student weaknesses so they can turn them into strengths throughout the course of the school year. In addition, improved assessments can identify high-achieving students who require support to maintain their academic engagement and provide them the resources necessary to continue to help them excel.

For the past three years, teams of academic and testing experts—and most importantly, teachers—have been working tirelessly to create testing options aligned to the higher standards. The tests aim to:

- Accurately measure student progress toward college and career readiness;
- Assess a wide range of skills, including real-world, critical thinking and writing skills; and
- Provide real-time information on student progress to help guide teacher instruction and improve learning.

Pennsylvania will administer a revised Pennsylvania Core Standards-aligned assessment, the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA), in reading and math for students in grades 3–8. High school students enrolled in Algebra I and literature will take aligned Keystone end-of-course exams.

During this time of transition, it is important to advocate for the key criteria that will make our tests a strong measuring stick of how our students are doing on the path to college and careers at the state and national level. Leaders are optimistic that the assessments will include many of the criteria that make up a high-quality test and mean higher quality instruction for all students. As advocates, we need to ensure that our state tests not only accurately measure college and career readiness, but also possess these characteristics in order to be useful tools that benefit our students.

## What Does a High-Quality Assessment System Include?

- A comprehensive testing system consisting of a summative state assessment that can be paired with local formative or interim assessments;
- Summative and formative assessments that are developed with input from academic and test experts, as well as teachers;
- An assessment that is piloted and contains questions that are field-tested and reviewed by a team of experts before full implementation;
- A variety of question formats that assess a wide range of real-world skills and content knowledge;
- Detailed and timely feedback that is easy for parents and teachers to understand and discuss;
- Ability to serve as an early warning signal to identify struggling students so that effective interventions can be put in place; and

- Comparability to other states so students who move from one state to another will be held to the same standards of performance and have a smoother transition

## Frequently Asked Questions

### 1. What is the difference between curriculum and standards?

- Standards are a set of guidelines for what students are expected to know and be able to do at specific points in their education. Standards provide the foundation for key components of the education system, including curricula, instructional materials, teacher training, and assessments.
- A curriculum is the course of study covering the standards. It is set by local school districts and includes the lesson plans, programs, and textbooks that teachers use to teach the content and skills outlined in the standards.
- Every field in the National Football League (NFL) is the same length and width. No matter the location of the game, the field is exactly the same, and so are the rules of the game. But the playbook for each team is significantly different. In the world of education, the field and rules are the standards, while the different playbooks are the curricula.

### 2. If students are learning with different curricula, how can they take the same test?

- Although teachers use different materials and curricula, students still learn the same skills outlined in the standards. Teachers can be creative in their instruction, designing lessons to best reach their students and creating a classroom where all students can achieve.
- In the NFL, coaches all play by the same consistent rules, but develop different strategies for success. The strategies highlight the strengths of the individual players, but the coaches work to strengthen the skills of all players so they can be successful in any situation. This is much like the way teachers design lessons to reach all students and help them overcome their weaknesses.

### 3. Will the new test replace the old state test?

- Yes. This school year, newly aligned and revised PSSA and Keystone exams will replace the old tests that were aligned to the old standards.



## Why Support the Pennsylvania Core Standards?

- They are more rigorous academic standards that prepare all students for success after high school.
- They emphasize real-world skills like critical thinking and problem-solving.
- They are comparable across states.

## Why Do We Need Better Tests?

- They give us an honest, objective report of how our students are doing.
- They ensure all students are held to the same expectations.
- They identify struggling students early on so they can get the help they need and graduate prepared for the future.

#### 4. How will test scores impact schools and districts?

- School-wide test results will be used as one measure for school accountability. Just as tests are used as academic checkups for individual students, they also serve as checkups for our schools. Districts need to identify struggling students and schools in need of support so that interventions can be put in place to ensure all students across Pennsylvania receive a high-quality education.

#### 5. How will test scores impact teachers?

- Student achievement is one of the measures used in a teacher's evaluation. Scores from standardized assessments cannot comprise more than 5% of a teacher's total evaluation.

#### 6. How will test scores impact students?

- Beginning with the Class of 2017, students must pass end-of-course Keystone Graduation Exams in Algebra I, English, and Biology in order to graduate. There is current proposed legislation that would make this requirement up to individual districts to decide.

#### 7. What kind of data will be collected? Will it be released?

- Under the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Pennsylvania is required to collect data on the performance of schools. Data collected will include student test scores and information such as attendance, support services, and academic growth. Information which allows for identification of an individual student that is collected by the Department of Education is considered personally identifiable information and may not be released without parental consent. *Only individuals who interact with students on a daily basis, such as teachers and parents, are allowed to see this student-specific information.* Federal law protects the privacy of student information and education records through the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). The only publicly available information will be aggregate data for schools and districts.
- Pennsylvania also passed legislation reinforcing that the state will not collect additional data on students beyond what is already collected.

#### 8. Do students need to be computer literate?

- Students do need to be computer literate. While it may take some time to ensure that every school has the hardware necessary and meets the technology requirements, computer-based assessments are a smart investment. Ensuring that all students, regardless of geography or household income, have equal access to technology is critical to preparing students for a 21st century competitive workforce.
- Paper and pencil versions of the Keystone exams will be available during the first three years of testing for schools that have trouble meeting the technology requirement.

#### 9. Why are end-of-course exams (EOCs) important?

- The idea of EOCs started under Ed Rendell's term as governor. By using EOCs you can identify a problem early, so that teachers and parents can address it over the summer through additional learning opportunities. Teachers also begin the following school year with the background information they need to understand a student's strengths and weaknesses so they can continue to help them improve.
- Although there has been a lot of criticism of EOCs for being too "high stakes," students who do not achieve proficiency have many other options. They receive immediate remediation and are able to retake the section of the test with which they struggled. Students also have the option to complete a project that demonstrates their proficiency of the subject if they repeatedly struggle with the EOC. School districts also have the authority to waive the EOC graduation requirement for up to 10% of their students. This allows for local control and multiple strategies for students to demonstrate their proficiency in any subject area.

#### 10. Why do we have graduation requirements?

- We need to ensure that students are ready for postsecondary education. Successfully meeting graduation requirements assures our students that they received a high-quality education and will be prepared for college without having to pay for non-credit remedial courses.

#### 11. Where can I go for more information?

- [www.pdesas.org](http://www.pdesas.org)
- [www.pabusinesseducationpartnership.com](http://www.pabusinesseducationpartnership.com)
- [www.pa-commoncorestandards.com](http://www.pa-commoncorestandards.com)
- [www.BusinessForCore.org](http://www.BusinessForCore.org)