



The Pennsylvania Alternate System of Assessment:

Answers to Questions
Frequently Asked by Families

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the PASA DLM?

The Pennsylvania Alternate System of Assessment (PASA) Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM) is a statewide alternate assessment designed only for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who meet the state criteria to participate. The PASA DLM is designed to maximize accessibility and allow multiple ways for students to demonstrate their knowledge, skills, and understandings.

The online assessment is delivered one-on-one, providing one test item at a time, and adapts based on the student's performance. Parents can learn more by choosing "parent" on the left side of the PA DLM webpage.

Who takes the PASA DLM?

The PASA DLM is administered in grades 3 through 8 and 11 in ELA and Math. Science is taken in grades 5, 8, and 11. The grade levels correspond to the accountability grade levels of the general assessments. In order for a student to take the PASA DLM, the individualized education program (IEP) team must determine they are eligible by answering “yes” to all six of Pennsylvania’s eligibility criteria.

The *PASA Eligibility Criteria: IEP Team Decision-Making* companion tool can be accessed on the PaTTAN website at: <https://tinyurl.com/PASAEligibilityTool>

Who decides whether a student will take the PASA DLM?

The parent is a key member of the IEP team in making the eligibility determination for the PASA DLM. The IEP team must review the six PASA eligibility criteria and answer “YES” to each for the child to take the PASA DLM. The IEP team cannot change or override the state’s six PASA eligibility criteria. The IEP team 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 DLM?

No. All students must be assessed under federal requirements for accountability purposes. Students with IEPs are assessed through either the PSSA, the Keystone Exams, or the PASA DLM as determined by their IEP team. Per Pennsylvania School Code, a parent can request to have their child be opted out of the state assessment if they believe it conflicts with their religious beliefs. However, this not an IEP team decision. If a parent requests a religious opt out, they must follow the process for religious exemption with school administrators, and the IEP team must still address the state assessment section of the IEP as if the child were taking the test.

What content is assessed on the PASA DLM?

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 DLM is aligned to grade level Pennsylvania Core Standards in Mathematics and English Language Arts and the Pennsylvania STEELS (science, technology and engineering, environmental literacy and sustainability) standards. These standards are broad; therefore, the PSSA assesses more precise knowledge and skills, known as eligible content. The PASA DLM assesses knowledge and skills referred to as Essential Elements. The Essential Elements are reduced in depth, breadth, and complexity.

How do English Learner students participate in the PASA DLM?

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 DLM. For any language other than English, an interpreter may be used to present the PASA DLM during the first three years that a student is categorized as an EL (English Learner) in U.S. schools.

What can a student expect on the day(s) of testing?

The PASA DLM is an untimed, online, adaptive assessment with several levels of difficulty. After a few questions are completed, they are scored and the next set of questions is assigned. The next set of questions may be less difficult, more difficult, or the same level of difficulty based on how the student answered previously. In addition, students may use objects or tactile representations during the test, while others may be able to answer the questions online with the assistance of their teacher or test administrator. The test is given in a one-to-one setting by the child’s teacher or other qualified personnel who are familiar with the student. The Bureau of Special Education recommends the test be administered in an environment that is familiar to the student. The test is designed to be given in smaller chunks across multiple sessions. This better matches classroom instruction. Teachers also have flexibility in scheduling the test during the spring assessment window. They can choose the order of the subjects given.

Why is it important for all students to participate in state assessment?

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 instruction of the academic standards. Assessment results are one measure that IEP teams may consider when determining future academic instructional needs. Because the PASA DLM is designed for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, the results provide a better representation of how the child is performing based against grade-level standards and Essential Elements that are reduced in depth, breadth, and complexity. The PASA DLM is typically administered in the spring of each school year. Parents receive an individual score report from the school that gave the assessment. Schools receive score reports in mid-summer and may choose to provide immediately or upon return to school in the fall.

Can students receive a regular diploma if they participate in the PASA DLM?

Yes. Students with disabilities can graduate with a regular high school diploma in Pennsylvania by either meeting state graduation requirements 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 content, as done in some other states. Students who take the PASA DLM are expected to graduate based upon IEP goals rather than the typical 5 Pathways in Pennsylvania.

Are there long-term considerations that should be made when qualifying a student, especially a young child, to participate in the PASA DLM?

Yes. When considering PASA eligibility, IEP teams should start with the end in mind. While the PASA DLM is an appropriate option for students who have the most significant cognitive disabilities and meet all six of the eligibility criteria, IEP teams must consider how taking the alternate assessment may affect future goals and opportunities for the student. Students who take the PASA DLM are instructed with Essential Elements, which represent a reduced version of the general education content. Therefore, IEP teams should consider implications of instruction and assessment that are reduced in depth, breadth, and complexity.

Will a student's participation or performance on the PASA DLM drive educational placement decisions?

No. The purpose of the PASA DLM is not to make educational placement recommendations. Likewise, PASA eligibility determinations should not be made on the sole basis of the student's educational placement. For example, not all students in a Life Skills Support or Autistic Support program will qualify for the PASA DLM. Only students who meet all six PASA eligibility criteria as determined by the IEP team should participate in the PASA DLM, regardless of the educational placement or location of services.

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://tinyurl.com/PDEpasa>
- Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network: <https://tinyurl.com/PaTTANpasa>
- PA Dynamic Learning Maps: <https://dynamiclearningmaps.org/pennsylvania>

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.

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Josh Shapiro, Governor

