



# The Pennsylvania Alternate System of Assessment:

Answers to Questions  
Frequently Asked by Families

## 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 System of School Assessment (PSSA) or Keystone Exams, even with accommodations. The PASA presents relevant questions that are appropriate to the student's needs and abilities. The

test is given in short parts, so the student does not become overwhelmed. The English Language Arts, Math and Science assessments are designed for students with significant cognitive disabilities to show what they know and can do. Dynamic Learning Maps ([DLM](#)) serves as the vendor. Parents can access resources by choosing "parent" on the left side of the website.

## ***Who takes the PASA?***

Students who are only in the 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. In order for a student to take the PASA, 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://www.pattan.net/Publications/PASA-Eligibility-Criteria-Decision-Making-Companio>

## ***Who decides whether a student 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 is most appropriate for the child. In addition, the IEP team must consider the six PASA eligibility criteria and answer “YES” to each for the child to take the PASA. 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?***

No. All students must be assessed under federal requirements for accountability purposes. Students with IEPs are assessed through either the PSSA, the Keystone, or the PASA 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 feel it conflicts with their religious beliefs. However, this is 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?***

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. The 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 PASA assessment will continue to be aligned with the AEC for all tested subjects.

## ***How do English Learner students participate in the PASA?***

Students in their first year in the United States are not required to participate in all state assessments for English. 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.

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

The PASA 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 (BSE) 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 6-week window in the spring. 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 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 AEC that are reduced in depth, breadth, and complexity. Parents receive an individual score report from the school that gave the assessment. Schools receive score reports in late Summer and may choose to provide immediately or upon return to school in the Fall.

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.

### ***Can students 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 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 eligible content, as done in some other states.

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

Yes. When considering PASA eligibility, IEP teams should start with the end in mind. While the PASA 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 are instructed with the alternate eligible content, which is a reduced version of the general education content. Therefore, instruction and assessment that are reduced in depth, breadth, and complexity may not provide the proper foundations the student needs to attain future goals.

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

No. The purpose of the PASA 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. Only students who meet all six PASA eligibility criteria as determined by the IEP team should participate in the PASA, 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>

*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

Tom Wolf, Governor

