



The Pennsylvania Alternate System of Assessment:

Answers to Questions
Frequently Asked by Families

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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 and tasks 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. There is no longer a video recording requirement associated with the PASA. The PASA assessment and vendor are new beginning the 2020-21 school year.

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. In order for a student to take the PASA, the individualized education program (IEP) 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-Companion>

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 in order for the child to take the PASA. 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 exempted or opted out of the state assessment if they feel the assessment conflicts with their religious beliefs. However, this is 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.

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 new 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 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.

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

The PASA is an untimed online assessment. Some 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 student may take the test over several days, as long as it is completed within the state-specified testing window.

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 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 results 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.

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 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.

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, the instruction and assessment that is reduced in depth, breadth, and complexity may not provide the proper foundations the student will require 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 services the student receives.

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

