

# How do standardized tests affect students and public schools?

## *Rules of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).*



(Learn more at [http://www.pde.state.pa.us/a\\_and\\_t/site/default.asp?g=0&a\\_and\\_tNav=|630|&k12Nav=|1141|.](http://www.pde.state.pa.us/a_and_t/site/default.asp?g=0&a_and_tNav=|630|&k12Nav=|1141|.) )

### **Question #1. What is a standardized test?**

- A standardized test measures student achievement.
- It shows how each student is learning compared to others. It is not a test of intelligence.
- Students in each grade across the state answer the same questions on a standardized test.
- The test may cover only one subject or many subjects, such as reading, math, or science.

### **Question #2. Are there other ways to measure student achievement?**

- Public schools measure student achievement in many ways, in addition to standardized tests.
- Teachers monitor student performance each day in the classroom.
- Teachers should give daily feedback to students, including comments and suggestions.
- Homework assignments, projects, and tests also measure how students are doing.
- Parents should get this information in regular progress reports, report cards, and conferences.

### **Question #3. What standardized tests are required by NCLB for Pennsylvania students?**

- NCLB requires all public schools to give standardized tests to all students.
- Pennsylvania's main test is the PSSA (Pennsylvania System of School Assessment).
- The PSSA is currently given in math, reading, and writing. It will be given in science starting in the 2005-2006 school year.
- Starting in the 2004-2005 school year, the PSSA will be given in one subject in almost every year from 3<sup>rd</sup> grade through 12<sup>th</sup> grade.
- NCLB also requires some public schools to give another test called NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress). Each state must select public schools to take the NAEP in 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading and math.

### **Question #4. What is tested on the PSSA?**

- The PSSA asks questions that follow the state guidelines for what students should learn.
- The state guidelines for each grade and each subject are called "academic content standards".
- Teachers should follow the guidelines and teach the required knowledge and skills to all students. Teachers should have high expectations that all children can learn this information.
- The PSSA should not contain biased questions referring to cultural issues not familiar to students from different racial, ethnic, religious, or national backgrounds.
- Appropriate accommodations on the PSSA are necessary to allow students with disabilities and English language learners show what they have learned.

*See the other side for more information.*

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**Education Law Center/Penna. School Reform Network – ELC/PSRN**

**Offices in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh**

**215-238-6970      www.elc-pa.org      412-391-5225**

ELC/PSRN works with many parents and groups. Please call us for assistance with individual school problems or more general problems with the education system. We look forward to speaking with your group. If your child's rights are violated under any law, ask for legal assistance. ELC operates a HelpLine at the numbers above. The ELC website ([www.elc-pa.org](http://www.elc-pa.org)) contains fact sheets and information about other organizations and sources of help.

**Question #5. What does the PSSA show about your children’s academic achievement?**

- Your children will receive an annual report explaining their performance scores on the PSSA.
- NCLB provides three possible achievement levels, also called “achievement standards”:
  1. Advanced – the student is mastering the material above expectations.
  2. Proficient – the student is learning the material at the minimum acceptable level. The student should work to strengthen academic performance.
  3. Basic – the student is not doing well enough. This is a “failing” score. If the student’s performance does not improve, he or she will not learn the required knowledge and skills. The school must give parents complete information about how the student can make better progress. The student may need tutoring or extra help.
- ❖ Pennsylvania has a fourth level, “Below Basic”, indicating students who need the most help. These students are far behind their expected grade level.

**Question #6. Is the PSSA a good measurement of student achievement?**

NCLB requires the PSSA and other state assessments to have the following characteristics:

1. overall high quality;
2. valid and reliable for the purposes of the test;
3. consistent with professional and technical standards;
4. objectively measuring academic achievement, knowledge, and skills; and
5. not evaluating or assessing personal or family beliefs and attitudes.

Here are some questions you can ask about whether the PSSA meets these 5 requirements. Does the test match the state academic content and achievement standards described above? Are teachers using the state content guidelines in their classrooms? Does the test contain any subjective bias, where some questions refer to unfamiliar cultural or ethnic issues? Are disabled students and English language learners receiving reasonable accommodations and alternatives?

**Question #7. How does the PSSA affect teachers and schools?**

- The PSSA results are used to measure school progress. Schools must improve the PSSA scores in every year for all student groups by gender, race and ethnicity, disabilities, limited English proficiency, migrant status, and low-income status.
- When a school does not meet the PSSA goals for “adequate yearly progress” (AYP), the state requires school improvement actions.
- Teachers feel great pressure to increase the PSSA scores of their students. Teachers do not want their students to score at the “Basic” or “Below Basic” achievement levels. Teachers may be evaluated each year based on the PSSA scores of their students.
- Schools should not take students out of core academic classes to practice test-taking skills. Teachers should practice these skills with students as a normal part of daily instruction.
- Schools must not give students the answers or extra chances to correct their work on the test.

**GET INVOLVED TODAY. YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE!**

**How can you get more information?**

- Read the ELC fact sheet, “What can you do to help your children with standardized tests?”
- See other ELC fact sheets about NCLB and many other education issues. Visit our website or call our offices. *Contact information is on the front of this page.*
- Call ELC for help with individual school problems for your children.
- Ask ELC to come speak with your community group or church.