



Teachers' Desk Reference: Practical Information for Pennsylvania's Teachers

Pennsylvania Academic Standards and Assessment Anchors

Academic Standards

As you develop lesson plans linked to the Pennsylvania Academic Standards, you may be wondering why the standards are important and how standards-aligned lessons increase student achievement.

The Pennsylvania Academic Standards provide consistent targets for students, teachers, and parents in meeting the challenge of educating our students at the highest level. The standards reflect the increasing knowledge and skills students are expected to achieve as they progress through school. They are designed to be rigorous, measurable, clearly written, and applicable to the world in which we live. Standards-aligned instruction provides a solid foundation for all students to master academic content, skills, and processes for lifelong personal and professional growth.

The Pennsylvania Academic Standards:

- Define what each student should know and be able to do in core subjects.
- Provide students with a solid foundation in the basics.

- Provide a measure of student achievement.
- Help parents, teachers, schools, and districts track student progress from year to year.

How should teachers present standards to their students?

Identifying the content standard for instruction establishes a direction for student learning. When presenting a standard to your students, write it in student-friendly language, so that it reflects what your students should be able to understand, know, or be able to do as a result of instruction. For example:

Fifth grade math standard 2.4.5D states, "Distinguish between relevant and irrelevant information in a mathematical problem." The teacher could have the standard referenced in lesson plans and posted on the board for students stating, "The lesson goal is to read a word problem and choose which information is needed and which information is not needed to solve the problem."

Are all Pennsylvania school districts required to follow the Academic Standards?

Yes. The Pennsylvania Academic Standards are part of Chapter 4 of the Pennsylvania School Code, which was adopted in 1999 and is now regulation. Chapter 4 establishes a single, clear, concise, and comprehensive regulation to govern the educational offerings of the schools in the commonwealth. School districts possess the freedom to design curriculum and instruction to ensure that students meet or exceed the standards' expectations. All of the Pennsylvania Academic Standards can be viewed and downloaded from the Pennsylvania Department of Education website at: www.education.state.pa.us.

Does Chapter 4 address special education services?

Yes. Chapter 4 addresses all students and programs in Pennsylvania and there is a specific section on special education. Since all students must participate in the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA), PSSA-Modified, or Pennsylvania Alternate System of Assessment (PASA), when an Individualized Education Program (IEP) is developed for a student, a team of professionals and parents must align the student's goals with the academic standards.

Are there other standards for students who have significant cognitive disabilities?

Yes. The Alternate Reading and Mathematics Standards describe what students with the most significant cognitive disabilities should know and be able to do at four grade level spans (third/fourth, fifth/sixth, seventh/eighth, and eleventh). The alternate standards for each grade span were derived from the general education content standards for the equivalent grade of the Academic Content Standards for all students. The third/fourth grade alternate standards link to the third grade academic content standards; the eleventh grade alternate standards link to the eleventh grade academic content standards; and so on. Grade-level academic content standards have been reinterpreted to be appropriate learning targets for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, and at the same time link the learning goals for these students with those of their nondisabled peers. All teachers who

interact with these students will assist them in learning these skills and strategies through multiple classroom situations in all the subject areas.

The Alternate Reading and Mathematics Standards also provide parents and community members with information about what students with the most significant cognitive disabilities should know and be able to do as they progress through their educational program and at graduation. With clearly defined targets provided by the standards, parents, students, educators and community members become partners in learning success.

The **Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA)** is a standards-based criterion-referenced assessment used to measure student attainment of Pennsylvania's academic standards while also determining the degree to which school programs enable students to attain proficiency of the standards.

The **Pennsylvania System of School Assessment-Modified (PSSA-M)** is a grade level state test that has been developed as an alternate assessment option. Students with Individualized Education Programs whose disabilities preclude grade level proficiency despite intensive intervention/instruction, and who meet specific other criteria, may be recommended for participation in the PSSA-M.

The **Pennsylvania Alternate System of Assessment (PASA)** is designed for students with severe disabilities who are unable to participate meaningfully in the PSSA or PSSA-M even with accommodations. The PASA consists of a series of on-demand performance items that require the use of reading and math skills.

More indepth information about these assessments is available on the PDE website at www.education.state.pa.us.

Are there standards for Pennsylvania's English Language Learners?

Yes. Pennsylvania's English Language Proficiency Standards for English Language Learners (ELPS for ELLs) have been carefully developed to meet the compliance requirements of Title I and Title III of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Educators throughout the state will find the ELPS for ELLs a useful starting point in planning instruction, assessment, and curriculum for English language learners in pre-school through high school. They are a guide for daily classroom instruction and student expectations for all teachers. There are five English language proficiency standards that center on the language needed by English language learners in grade levels PreK-12 to succeed both socially and academically in educational settings.

Assessment Anchors

What are Assessment Anchors?

The Assessment Anchors clarify the standards assessed on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) and can be used by educators to help prepare their students for the PSSA. The metaphor of an "anchor" is used to represent the unchanging connection that the Assessment Anchors have to the state assessment system and the curriculum/instructional practices in schools.

The Assessment Anchors were written with the intent of having interdisciplinary discussions about how the mathematics and reading Anchors can be taught in science, social studies, and other content areas. The intent of the Anchors is to clarify which standards are assessed on the PSSA, not to narrow the curriculum, but to focus teachers on the essential skills and knowledge in reading, mathematics, and science that must be taught across the curriculum, given the limited amount of time teachers have with students.

The Anchors are:

- **Clear** - They clarify which standards are assessed on the PSSA. They are easy to read and user-friendly.
- **Focused** - It would be impossible to assess every single standard on Pennsylvania's statewide assessment. Rather than have teachers "guess" which standards are most critical, the Anchors identify a core set of standards that could reasonably be assessed on a large-scale assessment.
- **Aligned** - The focus is on helping students achieve the state's standards. The Anchors align directly to Pennsylvania's standards in reading, mathematics, and science. The Anchors simply clarify the standards.
- **Grade Appropriate** - Teachers may have different ideas about what skills should be mastered by which grade levels. The Anchors provide clear examples of skills and knowledge that should be learned at the different grade levels that will be assessed on the PSSA.
- **Organized** - The Anchors are organized to support a curricular flow. Rather than simply identifying Anchors in the grades for which Pennsylvania has standards, the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) developed Assessment Anchors in grades 3 through 8 and 11 to encourage a curricular spiral that builds each year to the next.
- **Rigorous** - PDE has maintained the rigor of the state standards through the Anchors. Pennsylvania will continue to use performance tasks to assess higher order reasoning and problem-solving skills.
- **Manageable** - PDE has identified a set of standards that could be taught in a manageable way before the spring administration of the PSSA. This is continually analyzed to assure expectations are manageable.

How are the Assessment Anchors organized?

The Anchors are available in reading and mathematics in grades 3 through 8 and 11. They are also available for Science in grades 4, 8, and 11.

A sample Anchor page is below.

Reporting Category

Assessment Anchor

Reference to Standards

Eligible Content

Reading, Grade 5	
R5.A Comprehension and Reading Skills Reporting Category	
ASSESSMENT ANCHOR	
R5.A.2 Identify and interpret the meaning of vocabulary in nonfiction	
<p>R5.A.2 Identify and interpret the meaning of vocabulary in nonfiction</p>	<p>ELIGIBLE CONTENT</p> <p>R5.A.2.1.1 Identify and/or interpret the meaning of multiple-meaning words used in text.</p> <p>R5.A.2.1.2 Identify and/or interpret the meaning of content-specific words used in text.</p>
<p>Items that measure these Assessment Anchors will relate back to a reading passage. Students may reread the passage to help determine the best answer. See the item sampler for sample items.</p> <p>A single vocabulary question may take two different styles; one that reprints the sentence from the passage or one that refers back to the word in the passage. Every multiple-choice stem on the tests will be followed by four options.</p> <p>Reference:</p> <p>1.1.5.E Acquire a reading vocabulary by correctly identifying and using words.</p> <p>1.1.5.F Identify, understand the meaning of and use correctly key vocabulary from various subject areas.</p>	
<hr/> <p>Pennsylvania Department of Education Reading Grade 5 - Page 7 Assessment Anchors and Eligible Content 2007</p>	

- **Reporting Category** - The Anchors are organized by Reporting Category. There are five reporting categories in mathematics, two reporting categories in reading, and four reporting categories in science. The reporting categories are important because individual student scores on the state test are reported at this level. District and school reports may include reports by Assessment Anchor if there are enough questions on the PSSA to warrant a valid score by the broad Anchor statement.
- **Assessment Anchor** - The Assessment Anchor appears across the top of the anchor page. You read the Anchor like an outline. Just beneath it are more specific descriptors that can be used for instructional purposes.
- **References** - References are listed. The reference relates to the Academic Standards and helps you link the Anchors to the Standards.
- **Eligible Content** - The column on the right-hand side of the page underneath each Assessment Anchor is the Eligible Content. This is often known as the "assessment limits" and helps teachers identify how deeply they need to cover an Anchor and/or the range of the content they should teach to best prepare their students for the PSSA. Not all of the Eligible Content is assessed on the PSSA, but it shows the range of knowledge from which the test was designed.

How can teachers, schools, and districts use the Assessment Anchors?

Every teacher is responsible for teaching to the Anchors, not only reading and math teachers. Each department or subject area can "adopt" an assessment anchor in reading and math. They are then responsible for teaching and assessing the Anchor. The Assessment Anchors help focus teaching and learning because they are clear and manageable, and closely aligned to the PSSA. Shared responsibility for teaching essential skills in reading and math will help teachers and administrators be better informed about which standards will be assessed on state tests.

The Assessment Anchors should be used in combination with the Item and Scoring Samplers that includes released tasks from the PSSA. It also includes the PSSA blueprint in reading, math, and science. The test blueprint provides the weighting system of the Reporting Categories on the test. For example, in mathematics, Algebra is a reporting category that is more heavily weighted on the PSSA in grades 8 and 11 than in grades 3 to 7. With this degree of information, teachers can target the knowledge and skills in the larger curriculum. Another example, reading for inference, is a skill that all students at any level need to learn and practice. Staff can share the responsibility for teaching this skill in English class, as well as other areas in the curriculum. Elective and support staff can also "adopt" an Assessment Anchor. In this way, an entire school and community can teach and reinforce these critical reading, mathematics, and science standards.

Example: 5th Grade Reading Anchor

Anchor R5.A.2 Comprehension and Reading Skills—*Understand nonfiction text appropriate to grade level.*

The Anchor descriptor R5.A.2.5 further clarifies—*Summarize a nonfiction text as a whole.*

How could 5th grade teachers across content areas teach this skill?

Social Studies - Summarize an article on the effects of Western Expansion on the Native American way of life.

Environment and Ecology - Summarize the causes of environmental pollution in urban areas.

Health Education - Summarize the main points from an article on the impact of HIV on society.

World Languages - Retell or summarize the major ideas of an online newspaper article about the Mars landing of the "Spirit" explorer using a world language (Spanish, French, German or Japanese).

Are there Alternate Assessment Anchors?

Yes. Alternate Assessment Anchors clarify the standards assessed on the Pennsylvania Alternate System of Assessment (PASA) and can be used by educators to help prepare their students for the PASA. The Alternate Assessment Anchors do not replace the Alternate Content Standards. All

teachers are still required to teach to all of the standards and use local assessments to measure student progress. The Alternate Assessment Anchors and Eligible Content documents reference the general education standards from which the PASA Alternate Content Standards and Alternate Assessment Anchors were derived.

More information about the Standards and the Assessment Anchors can be found on Pennsylvania's Standards Aligned System (SAS) website at www.pdesas.org.

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA

Tom Corbett
Governor

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Ronald J. Tomalis
Secretary

Carolyn C. Dumaresq, Ed. D.
Deputy Secretary, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education

John J. Tommasini
Director, Bureau of Special Education

Patricia Hozella
Assistant Director, Bureau of Special Education

