

PASA

What is the PASA?

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA) requires that States and Local Education Agencies (LEAs) ensure that all children with disabilities are included in all general state and district-wide assessment programs, including assessments used for purposes of satisfying the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). If necessary, a state or LEA may create an alternate assessment. The Pennsylvania Alternate System of Assessment (PASA) was developed in accordance with this allowance to meet the needs of students with the most severe cognitive disabilities who are not able to participate in the general assessment even with accommodations. The PASA is aligned with Pennsylvania's academic content standards and measures the attainment of knowledge and skills of children with significant cognitive disabilities through performance tasks. Like the statewide standardized test (the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment or PSSA), the purpose of the PASA is to provide information to school districts and other educational service providers that will aid them in improving instruction for children.

Who should participate?

To participate in the PASA, students must meet specific criteria established by the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE), Bureau of Special Education (BSE). IDEA 2004 requires every IEP team to decide which state assessment is most appropriate for the student: the regular assessment (PSSA), the regular assessment with accommodations, or the alternate assessment based on alternate academic achievement standards (PASA). The PASA is appropriate for students having the most significant cognitive disabilities. Only a small percentage (1 to 2 percent) of students with IEPs taking statewide assessments will meet the criteria to take the PASA.

Using criteria developed by the PDE/BSE, each IEP team will determine if the PASA is an appropriate choice for the student using the six criteria listed below and document the decision on the student's IEP. To be eligible to take the alternate assessment, the student must meet all six criteria. If the answer to any of the criteria is "no," the PASA may not be the appropriate assessment choice.

Criterion 1. By September of the present school year, is the student in grades 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, or 11?

Criterion 2. Does the student have significant cognitive disabilities?

Criterion 3. Does the student require intensive instruction to learn?

Criterion 4. Does the student require adaptation and support in order to perform and/or participate meaningfully and productively in the everyday life activities of integrated school, home, community, and work environments?

Criterion 5. Does the student require substantial modifications of the general education curriculum?

Criterion 6. Does the student's participation in the general education curriculum differ greatly in form and/or substance from that of most other students (different objectives, materials or activities, for example)?

How are students assessed?

Like the PSSA, the PASA must assess reading-, mathematics-, and science-related skills and is designed to take a snapshot of students' typical performance on a small sample of academic skills from the Pennsylvania Alternate Standards.

These alternate standards form the basis of the PASA assessment items that students are given to perform. The PASA consists of a series of on-demand performance items that require the use of reading, math, and science skills. The assessment items are developed at three levels of difficulty to allow all students with significant cognitive disabilities to participate.

A videotape or narrative record is made as the student performs each item in the assessment. The IEP team determines if the student's performance will be recorded either by video or narrative notes.

How is the PASA scored?

Teams of educators use specific scoring rubrics to examine each assessment item and evaluate the accuracy and independence of each student's performance on the literacy, numeracy, or science skills. A student's independence is evaluated by rating the extent of prompting required from the assessment administrator.

Duplicate individual student reports with a cover letter are mailed to service providers. Parents receive one report, with the second one placed in the student's permanent record. The report details the range of activities related to the Pennsylvania Alternate Standards for reading, math, and science; the scaled score the student received in each content area; and the level of performance: Emerging, Novice, Proficient, or Advanced.

Scores are aggregated and summarized in a state-wide report, listing results by service provider and home district. These reports are available on the PASA website at www.pasaassessment.org. Care is given to protect the confidentiality of students' records.

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