

Assessment Anchors and Eligible Content



Pennsylvania Department of Education

www.pde.state.pa.us

2005

PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

General Introduction to the Pennsylvania Assessment Anchors

Introduction

Over the past year, the Department of Education has been working hard to create a set of tools designed to help educators improve instructional practices and better understand the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA). The Assessment Anchors are one of many tools that the Department believes will better align curriculum, instruction and assessment practices throughout the state. Without this alignment, we will not be able to significantly improve student achievement in the Commonwealth.

Why Assessment Anchors

Since 1999, the teachers across the Commonwealth have been using a set of state standards to develop curriculum and instructional materials. Likewise, the Department and teacher committees have been using the same standards to develop the state assessments. Over the last few years, however, teachers have expressed a need for a clearer document, noting that the Pennsylvania standards were often too broad and too many.

In an effort to provide greater clarity to the field about the assessment system and to better align the assessments to standards and instructional materials, the Department facilitated the development of what we call Assessment Anchors. The Assessment Anchors clarify the standards assessed on the PSSA and can be used by educators to help prepare their students for the PSSA. The metaphor is simple: the Assessment Anchors are designed to hold together or “anchor” both the state assessment system and the curriculum/instructional practices in schools.

How the Anchors Were Developed

The Department of Education identified the Assessment Anchors based on the recommendations of teachers serving on the Mathematics and Reading Assessment Advisory Committees and other curriculum experts. We also looked to national organizations (i.e., NCTM, NCTE and NAEP) and other external groups to ensure that the Anchors are:

- **Clear.** We wanted to clarify which standards are assessed on the PSSA. The Anchors should be easy to read and user-friendly.
- **Focused.** No state assesses every single standard on its statewide assessments—it would be impossible. 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 the state’s standards in Reading and Mathematics. 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 state tests.

- **Organized to support a curricular flow.** Rather than simply identifying Anchors in the grades for which the state has standards, we developed Assessment Anchors in Grades 3 through 8 and 11 to encourage a curricular spiral that builds each year to the next.
- **Rigorous.** We wanted to maintain the rigor of the state standards through the Anchors. The state will continue to use performance tasks to assess higher order reasoning and problem solving skills.
- **Manageable.** We wanted to identify a set of standards that could be taught in a manageable way before the Spring administration of the PSSA. We are looking forward to doing additional analysis to see if we have, in fact, identified a manageable set of expectations from the curricular view.

How to Use this Document

Keep in mind that the Assessment Anchors do not replace the standards. All teachers are still required to teach to all of the standards and use local assessments to measure student progress. The Anchors simply clarify which standards are assessed on the PSSA.

The Anchors are only available in Mathematics and Reading in Grades 3 through 8 and 11. Each page has a:

- **Reporting Category.** The Reporting Category appears at the very top of each page. There are five Reporting Categories in Mathematics and two Reporting Categories in Reading. Reporting Categories are important because individual student scores will be 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 in the shaded bar across the top of the page. You read the Anchor like an outline with the main concept shaded in gray. Just beneath, in the left-hand column, are more specific descriptors that can be used for instructional purposes. Both the concept in the shaded gray area and the descriptors (which appear one per page) are part of the Anchor.
- **References.** Below each specific descriptor of the Assessment Anchor is a reference in italics. This reference relates to the Pennsylvania Academic Standards and helps you cross-walk 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 we design the test.
- **Sample Items.** The sample items for Mathematics appear on the bottom half of the page. These are examples of how the Assessment Anchor might appear on the PSSA. Some of the pages may not have any sample items because we only

created three per Assessment Anchor. Teachers should see the Item Bank and the Item Sampler for sample items. There are no sample items for Reading included in the Assessment Anchor document.

Next Steps

Like the standards, the Anchors will be reviewed periodically to ensure that they represent the most important skills and knowledge that should be assessed on the PSSA.