Pennsylvania has a high-stake test in the area of writing in grades five, eight and eleven. All students are required to pass their state test by the year 2014 as mandated by No Child Left Behind (NCLB). The state writing assessment examines students’ proficiency based on the following: writing, narrative, informational and persuasive formal writing for an audience, including spelling and editing skills; and informal writing to capture and organize information for individual use. (iii) Speaking and Listening: Participation in conversation and formal speaking presentations.

In addition, PA tests students on editing skills. This is a critical area taught “authentically” in Blueprint for Exceptional Writing (BEW) in a way that no other model addresses. BEW prepares students for editing their peer’s writing selections just like they will be required to do on the state test.

*Even though Blueprint for Exceptional Writing was specifically written for students in grades kindergarten through the eighth grade, older students can benefit from this type of genre specific instruction. Students in grade eleven are tested on their ability to compose a persuasive writing selection. The format for this genre is the same across all grade levels; consequently older students can benefit from this teaching framework.
2006-07 PSSA Results
Frequently Asked Questions

What is the PSSA?
The PSSA (Pennsylvania System of School Assessment) is a standards-based assessment administered in all Pennsylvania public schools. There are three content-specific assessments including reading, math and writing.

Which grades take the PSSA?
No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requires annual testing in reading and math for all students in grades three to eight and one high school grade (eleventh grade in Pennsylvania).

The PSSA reading and math assessment has been given annually in grades five, eight, and eleven since 1998. The grade three PSSA reading and math assessment was first administered in 2004-05, and grades four, six, and seven were first added in 2005-06.

The PSSA writing assessment is given in grades five, eight and eleven about a month earlier than the reading and math tests. A new writing test was administered for the first time in 2006, so the results aren't comparable to previous results.

What do PSSA scores mean?
Students are identified as performing in one of four levels: advanced, proficient, basic and below basic. The goal is for all students to be proficient or advanced – meaning that they have mastered Pennsylvania's assessment anchor content standards at their grade level. Individual student scores, provided only to their respective schools and to their families, can be used to assist teachers in identifying students who may be in need of additional educational opportunities, and school scores provide information to schools and districts for curriculum and instruction improvement discussions and planning.

The four performance levels are broadly defined as:

1. Advanced – This level reflects superior academic performance. Advanced work indicates an in-depth understanding and exemplary display of the skills included in the Pennsylvania Academic Content Standards.

2. Proficient - Proficiency reflects satisfactory academic performance. Proficient work indicates a solid understanding and adequate display of the skills included in the Pennsylvania Academic Content Standards.

3. Basic – This level reflects marginal academic performance. Basic work indicates a partial understanding and limited display of the skills included in the Pennsylvania Academic Content Standards. This work is approaching satisfactory performance, but has not been reached. There is a need for additional instructional opportunities and/or increased student academic commitment to achieve the proficient level.

4. Below Basic – The lowest level reflects inadequate academic performance. Below basic work indicates little understanding and minimal display of the skills included in the Pennsylvania Academic Content Standards. There is a major need for additional instructional opportunities and/or increased student academic commitment to achieve the proficient level.

Do students have to pass the PSSA in order to graduate?
Students must demonstrate proficiency in reading and math in order to earn a high school diploma, but whether or not to require proficiency on the PSSA to graduate is a local decision. Districts may choose to use an alternative form of assessment to demonstrate proficiency for graduation requirements.
What are cut scores and how are they used?
Cut scores are the points on the range of scaled scores that identify the difference between performance levels. The cut scores define the range of scores that fall into a single performance category.

Will any new subjects be added to the PSSA?
In accordance with NCLB, Pennsylvania will be implementing a new science test for grades four, eight and eleven, which won’t officially begin until Spring 2008. NCLB requires a science assessment in one grade per elementary, middle, and high school level.

There are no plans to implement any new subject assessments or expansion of grades tested without any new requirements from the US Department of Education (USDE).

How long do the assessments take?
The reading and math tests take about two and a half to three hours each, not including time needed for teacher administration of the tests. The writing test takes approximately two and a half hours — one hour for each writing prompt — and another twenty minutes for the multiple choice portion. Tests are not timed, but suggested times are given for planning purposes.

How many students are taking the PSSA?
Approximately 140,000-150,000 students per grade level in three-eighth and eleventh grade took the math and reading PSSAs - that’s somewhere between 980,000 to 1,050,000 students, total.

How much did PDE spend on PSSA development, administration, and scoring (including AYP calculation)?
$32.7 million total, which includes the development of the tests as well as the overall administering, scoring, and publishing of the PSSAs and AYP calculations.

Are the tests all given at the same time?
In 2007, the math and reading tests were administered during the March 12-23 testing window. It’s up to the schools to decide which days to test. The writing test was given during February 12-23.

What else is new this year?
There was a voluntary field-test of the science test in Spring 2007 as part of the two-three year development of new tests. The development process involved various groups of educators and experts to ensure the tests are fair and non-biased. The field-test will allow us to evaluate and improve the test in preparation for this coming year.
## Blueprint for Exceptional Writing Correlation

**Guide to Pennsylvania State Writing Standards**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Genre Tested</th>
<th>BEW Chapters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fifth Grade</td>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>Narrative Persuasive</td>
<td>Chapter 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Informational</td>
<td>Chapter 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eight Grade</td>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>Narrative Persuasive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Informational</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifth Grade</td>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>Narrative Persuasive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td>Informational</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eight Grade</td>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>Narrative Persuasive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td>Informational</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Even though Blueprint for Exceptional Writing was specifically written for students in grades kindergarten through the eighth grade, older students can benefit from this type of genre specific instruction. Students in grade eleven are tested on their ability to compose a persuasive writing selection. The format for this genre is the same across all grade levels, consequently older students can benefit from this teaching framework.*

*Copyright Pearson, 2008*