

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

A Report on Standardized Tests in Public Education

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Act 2018-322 (SR 322) directed the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee (LBFC) to conduct a study and provide a report on standardized tests in public schools. Highlights of our report include the following:

- ❖ **Standardized test defined.** A “standardized test” is “any form of test that requires all test takers to answer the same questions, or selection of questions from a common bank of questions, in the same way, and that is scored in a standard or consistent manner, which makes it possible to compare the relative performance of individual students or groups of students.”
- ❖ **The modern standardized testing movement in the United States began with the enactment of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA).** ESEA was followed by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) that reauthorized and amended ESEA by mandating annual testing in reading, math, and science subject to strict federal oversight. In 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) repealed NCLB and reauthorized and amended ESEA by shifting power back to states and local school districts to determine how to improve troubled public schools.
- ❖ **Both principals and teachers indicated curricula scope has been narrowed to prepare students for PSSA exams and Keystone Exams.** The majority of principals and teachers indicated students are taught test-taking skills and administered practice tests in relation to the PSSA exams and Keystone Exams.
- ❖ **PDE indicated, in general, Pennsylvania state standardized tests continue to meet their intended uses to assess whether students are learning required content.** However, the assessments have been used at times for additional purposes beyond their original intent (e.g., graduation requirements, measuring teacher effectiveness, school building performance) with varied levels of success.
- ❖ **It is unlikely a transition to a nationally recognized high school assessment would result in the need for realignment of state academic standards as each individual state is authorized to establish its own academic standards and employ assessments.** A number of states using the ACT or SAT tests for high school assessment purposes have submitted for USDE peer review. Although the ACT or SAT may not align point for point with a state’s specific academic standards, the states using these tests maintain these tests are reasonably aligned for federal assessment purposes.



- ❖ **The origins of Pennsylvania standardized testing and state assessments can be traced back to the enactment in 1963 of the School District Reorganization Act (Act 1963-299).** In 1999, the foundation of Pennsylvania’s modern assessment system was laid when the State Board adopted Chapter 4 Academic Standards and Assessment regulations. The Pennsylvania state assessment system consists of six tests: PSSA, Keystone Exams, PASA, ACCESS for ELLs, CDT, and NAEP (all, except the CDT, are both state and federally mandated).
- ❖ **Pennsylvania’s school districts administer numerous other standardized tests.** These other exams (e.g., ACT, ASVAB, DIBELS, and SAT) are either voluntarily or mandatorily administered at the discretion of local school districts.
- ❖ **The majority of principals and teachers indicated they do not consider the PSSA exam or Keystone Exams to be effective indicators of student achievement, teacher evaluation, or school building performance.** Greater percentages of respondents, both principals and teachers, indicated they neither agree or disagree regarding the effectiveness of Keystone Exams versus the PSSA exams in measuring performance.
- ❖ **Pennsylvania’s VAAS can provide growth measures using ACT or SAT at the district and school levels using prior PSSA tests to set the expected scores of students.** Teacher growth measures, however, cannot be provided using ACT or SAT.
- ❖ **Accommodations are tools and procedures that provide equal access to instruction and assessment for students with disabilities.** Accommodations do not reduce expectations for learning. Generally speaking, accommodations do not impact the validity of assessments or the validity of the test as a growth measure as long as the state adheres to the recommended processes for developing the assessments and the state’s accommodation policies.
- ❖ **A small number of opt-outs could impact Pennsylvania’s Future Ready PA Index rating system.** Federal law specifies that state and local laws are not preempted from allowing parents to have their children opt-out of assessments.

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