



# Science Online Assessment Updates

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Dear Colleague:

As the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) plans for the implementation of the new Science, Technology, and Environmental Education Standards (STEELS) and online assessments, the Division of Assessment and Accountability would like to share the following updates to ensure you have the most accurate, current information:

## **PSSA STEELS Standards are now in place**

- The Spring 2025 Science PSSAs will be issued as a statewide census field test. PDE has received a waiver for federal reporting of PSSA Science scores for the Spring 2025 field test. However, this is not a waiver for participation. Participation in testing is still calculated, reported, and required. At least 95% of Grade 5 and Grade 8 students still must complete the PSSA Science assessment.
- Starting in with the 2024-2025 administration, and continuing each year thereafter, students will take the Science PSSA when enrolled in Grade 5 and Grade 8. Some students testing in 2024-2025 also took the PSSA Science assessment in 2023-2024 while enrolled in Grade 4. They must participate in the 2024-2025 field test.
- For 2024-2025, LEAs will receive a district level percentile report providing a percentile rank for each student. Student performance data will not be factored into accountability reporting. The PSSA Science testing window runs from April 28 to May 9, 2025.
- The 2025 Spring Keystone Biology assessment will include field-test items aligned to the new STEELS standards but is not a census field test. Accountability data for both performance and participation will be collected and reported. Students must take the Keystone Biology exam at least once by the end of Grade 11. The Spring Keystone Exam window runs from May 12 to 23, 2025.

## **This provides an opportunity to begin the transition to online assessments in non-accountability setting**

- The PSSA Science field test can be administered online. The enrollment system will default to online enrollment for 2025 Science. ELA and Mathematics enrollments will be based on 2024 tested counts.
- Science will not be included in PSSA early reporting or accountability reporting. LEAs will receive a percentile report showing each student's percentile rank compared to other students who took the same form.

- All Science online and paper assessments must be completed by May 9, 2025.

## **PSSA and Keystone Exams will only be administered online beginning with the Spring 2026 administration**

- For LEAs currently using paper/pencil, the transition to online test administration can begin in 2024-2025. LEAs can select any subset of the population to test online – certain buildings, grade levels, content areas, or groups of students can test online. LEAs may wish to consider piloting online testing with certain student or building populations.
- Online Tools Training and Online Tools Tutorials are available via the [Insight Portal](#). The Online Tools Training allows students to practice using the online testing platform. The platform is the same for PSSA, Keystone Exams, Classroom Diagnostic Test (CDT) and PA Firefly Student Progress Indicators.
- Once all testing transitions to online in 2025-2026, paper/pencil assessments will be available for students with accommodations requiring this format of testing as part of an IEP, 504 Plan, or adjudicated or residential placement.

## **The PA Firefly pilot program is another exciting opportunity to be at the forefront of Pennsylvania’s online assessment system**

- PDE is expanding its suite of assessments. PA Firefly is a new, free, high-quality benchmark assessment that is designed for Pennsylvania, aligned to Pennsylvania standards, and measures the same knowledge and skills as the PSSA and Keystone Exams. PA Firefly will be available for ELA grades 3–8, Mathematics grades 3–8, Keystone Algebra I, and Keystone Literature during the pilot in 2024–2025. The pilot window will run from November 18 to April 18.
- The PA Firefly benchmark is a fully online, computer-adaptive assessment designed to be administered as single-session tests on the same platform as the summative assessments. We anticipate each test session will take about one class period for students to complete.
- For the pilot year, ELA grades 3–8 will assess and report only reading; writing will be added in 2025–2026. For Mathematics, information will be reported for each of the five grade-level assessment anchors. PSSA Science for grades 5 and 8 and Keystone Biology will be added during the 2025–2026 school year.
- Students can take each PA Firefly assessment up to three times during the test window. Taking the assessment multiple times will help measure progress toward end-of-year learning goals. When to administer PA Firefly within the testing window is a decision for each LEA. PDE is in the process of developing some suggested assessment schedules that LEAs could use depending on their calendar— semesters, trimesters, or quarters.
- PDE is also developing suggested assessment schedules which will include the Classroom Diagnostic Tools (CDT) and the PA Firefly benchmark assessments. The

CDT and PA Firefly are not interchangeable: each has its own use and purpose, and each provides unique benefits. The CDT is a true diagnostic assessment that helps determine where to focus instruction to meet day-to-day learning goals; the PA Firefly benchmark is designed to be an interim assessment that supports end-of-year goals and will provide a prediction as to how students will perform on the PSSA or Keystone assessments. The CDT and PA Firefly assessments are free to Pennsylvania schools and use the same testing systems and processes as the summative assessments.

- If your district or school is interested in participating in the PA Firefly benchmark pilot this year, please complete this [online form](#).



If you have any questions about the Science assessments, PA Firefly Benchmark, or piloting any online assessments, please contact the Division of Assessment and Accountability at [ra-ed-pssa-keystone@pa.gov](mailto:ra-ed-pssa-keystone@pa.gov). Thank you for your continued participation and leadership as we prepare for this critical initiative.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, which reads "Brian W. Campbell". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Brian W. Campbell  
Director  
Bureau of Curriculum, Assessment, and Instruction