

State Assessments

Keystone Exams and PSSA

Sample test items below provide examples of the increased rigor of the Keystone Exams at the secondary level and the PA Core Standards aligned PSSAs.

PSSAs in 2014 will include field test items aligned to PA Core Standards. Students may find these items more challenging, and while they are not counted in the scoring for the assessment, they offer a preview for what is coming in 2015.

Sample Test Items | Keystone Exams

To gain an understanding of the rigor of the Keystone Exams, sample questions are reproduced below.

Keystone Exam – Literature

Sample Test Item

Read the sentence from the passage.

“Javier’s fancy white shirt and blue-striped silk tie with a gold-rimmed gem shone brightly as he sat down at the dinner table among his commonly dressed family.” What is the effect of the imagery used to describe Javier’s clothes?

- A. It shows Javier feels superior to his family.
- B. It implies Javier feels uncomfortable around his family.
- C. It emphasizes the differences between Javier and his family.
- D. It suggests the time of year that Javier visits his family.

Keystone Exam – Biology

Sample Test Item

Alveoli are microscopic air sacs in the lungs of mammals. Which statement best describes how the structure of the alveoli allows the lungs to function properly?

- A. They increase the amount of energy transferred from the lungs to the blood.
- B. They increase the flexibility of the lungs as they expand during inhalation.
- C. They increase the volume of the lungs, allowing more oxygen to be inhaled.
- D. They increase the surface area of the lungs, allowing efficient gas exchange.

Keystone Exam – Algebra I
Sample Test Item

Anna burned 15 calories per minute running for x minutes and 10 calories per minute hiking for y minutes. She spent a total of 60 minutes running and hiking and burned 700 calories. The system of equations shown below can be used to determine how much time Anna spent on each exercise.

$$\begin{aligned}15x + 10y &= 700 \\ x + y &= 60\end{aligned}$$

What is the value of x , the minutes Anna spent running?

- A. 10
- B. 20
- C. 30
- D. 40

Sample Test Items | PSSAs

To gain an understanding of the rigor of the PSSAs scheduled for implementation in 2015, sample questions are reproduced below.

PSSA – Grade 4 Mathematics
Sample Test Item

Craig draws two angles. The smaller angle is an acute angle, and the larger angle is an obtuse angle. The measure of the smaller angle is 10° less than the measure of the larger angle. Both angle measures are whole numbers of degrees. What is the greatest possible measure of the larger angle?

- A. 89°
- B. 91°
- C. 99°
- D. 100°

PSSA – Grade 3 English Language Arts
Sample Test Item

Read the sentence from the passage.

There was only the high sky above her, and down below her the water was talking to itself.

What does the phrase “talking to itself” mean about the water?

- A. It is noisy.**
- B. It may be dangerous.**
- C. It is moving swiftly.**
- D. It would be fun for swimming.**

The PSSA for student in grades 3 through 8 is now an English Language Arts assessment rather than a reading assessment. Effective spring 2015, it will also include a writing component at every grade. Previously, the Writing PSSA was only administered in grades 5, 8, and 11.

Additionally, the PSSA in grades 4 through 8 includes the addition of passage-based essays in the English Language Arts assessment whereby students will read a short passage and write a short essay drawing evidence from the text to support the response.

While this sampler is designed as a snapshot of the assessments, PDE’s assessment website includes many more samples, new scoring rubrics, as well as historical items. Access this site at http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/state_assessment_system/20965/pennsylvania_system_of_school_assessment_%28pssa%29/1190526.