



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**THIS INFORMATION IS EMBARGOED UNTIL 11 A.M. TUESDAY, SEPT. 29**

**Department of Education Releases Results From New PA Core-Aligned Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA)**

*New assessment marked more rigorous education standards*

**Harrisburg, PA** – State Education Secretary Pedro A. Rivera announced today that the department has released the results of the 2015 administration of the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA).

The PSSA is administered in grades 3 through 8 in English language arts and mathematics. The spring administration of the assessment marked the first time the test was aligned to the new, more rigorous Pennsylvania Core Standards. The PSSA science assessments administered in grades 4 and 8 were unchanged.

The results on the new assessment show fewer students are scoring advanced or proficient, particularly in mathematics. However, Pennsylvania student performance on the new test is similar to what many other states experienced when transitioning to more rigorous standards.

“Since preliminary results were discussed at the State Board of Education’s meeting in July, the Department has been consistent in explaining to stakeholders that the 2015 PSSA is fundamentally different than previous assessments,” Rivera said. “It’s crucial that people understand comparing old scores to new scores isn’t a reliable indicator of student growth or academic achievement. This year’s results are truly the new benchmark.”

The State Board of Education approved the PA Core Standards in fall 2013, and performance level descriptors (PLDs) were developed for each grade in each subject. PLDs describe what a student is expected to know in each of the four performance levels: advanced, proficient, basic, and below basic. Proficient is considered to be “on grade level.”

Rivera noted that under the heightened standards some material is being tested a full grade level earlier than under the previous standards, with more emphasis on analysis and complex problem solving.

After the State Board’s approval of the standards, school districts were tasked with developing new curriculum to meet the PA Core.

The impact of the new assessment on student scores also prompted a federally-approved pause in using the new scores to determine School Performance Profiles (SPP) for schools that administered the PSSA.

“The PA Core Standards are purposefully more challenging in order to better prepare Pennsylvania students to be college and career ready when they graduate, and in the limited time since the new standards were approved, our schools and teachers have been working hard to align course content to the PA Core,” Rivera said. “The increased standards were not intended to penalize students, schools, or teachers -- and given adequate transition time and tools, we are confident our students will be successful.”

In addition to being needed to meet federal and state requirements, standardized tests provide useful information for educators, stakeholders, and policymakers about the commonwealth’s students and schools, and can inform instructional practices. However, due to the heavy reliance on assessment scores in evaluating schools and students, Governor Wolf has directed PDE to engage with stakeholders, including school administrators and teachers, lawmakers, and advocates, to discuss ways to more holistically assess student achievement and school performance.

“While the PSSA can be a helpful tool for teachers and parents, Governor Wolf and I agree that Pennsylvania needs to consider options for a more comprehensive approach to measuring student achievement. There are many pathways to postgraduate success, and our measurement should capture a broader array of those pathways,” Rivera said.

PSSA data and additional information can be found at:  
<http://www.education.pa.gov/Pages/PSSA-Information>.

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