

Summary of Pennsylvania Performance Standards

The Pennsylvania Accountability System applies to all public schools and districts. It is based upon the Commonwealth's content and achievement standards, student testing, and other key indicators of school and district performance such as attendance and graduation rates. The Pennsylvania Accountability System has the same end goal as the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) – *having 100 percent of students in the Commonwealth proficient or above in reading and math by the year 2014*. Proficiency is measured using the annually administered Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) which is a criterion-referenced test used to assess a student's mastery of the state's academic standards.ⁱ Schools are evaluated on a minimum target level of improvement called Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). The accountability system includes a series of rewards and consequences based on school and district performance.ⁱⁱ

Assessment Grades and Subjectsⁱⁱⁱ

Pennsylvania has adopted academic content standards in 12 main areas: 1) arts and humanities; 2) career education and work; 3) civics and government; 4) economics; 5) environment and ecology; 6) family and consumer sciences; 7) geography; 8) health, safety and physical education; 9) history; 10) mathematics; 11) reading, writing, speaking and listening; and 12) science and technology.^{iv} These standards identify what a student should know and be able to do at varying grade levels. School districts are given the freedom to design curriculum and instruction to ensure that students meet or exceed the standards' expectations.

The Commonwealth currently uses the PSSA to test student performance in three areas (reading, writing, and mathematics) to measure attainment of the academic standards. Every Pennsylvania student in grades 3-8 and grade 11 is assessed in reading and math. Every Pennsylvania student in grades 5, 8, and 11 is assessed in writing. As required by NCLB, the Commonwealth is also now developing grade-span assessments in science. Science field tests will be conducted April-May 2007 in grades 4, 8, and 11 and full implementation for these three grades is expected by the 2007-2008 school year. Pennsylvania plans to engage in a standards-setting process to determine specific science performance expectations and to adjust intermediate performance goals as additional grades are added so that *100 percent of students in the Commonwealth will be proficient or above in science by 2014*.^v

Performance against the standards is measured using the level descriptors shown in the following table. Student achievement is classified as either advanced, proficient, basic, or below basic. For schools and districts to meet Adequate Yearly Progress requirements as discussed below, students must perform at the "proficient" level or above.

Table 1: Pennsylvania's General Performance Level Descriptors	
<u>Advanced</u>	The Advanced 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.
<u>Proficient</u> <i>(students must perform at this level or above to be considered as having reached the Commonwealth's performance expectations)</i>	The Proficient Level reflects satisfactory academic performance. Proficient work indicates a solid understanding and adequate display of the skills included in the Pennsylvania Academic Content Standards.
<u>Basic</u>	The Basic 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.
<u>Below Basic</u>	The Below Basic 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.

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)

The Commonwealth has developed a system to measure whether districts and schools are on track to meet the state's performance expectations. Each year, school and district performance is analyzed and a determination is made by the state as to whether "Adequate Yearly Progress," or AYP, is being made. Three main criteria are used to determine AYP status:

1. PSSA test results (year-by-year performance goals are shown in Table 2). AYP is judged based either on a subgroup's, school's or LEA's current test score, or its two-year average, whichever is higher;
2. Participation rates on the PSSA (schools must show at least a 95% student participation rate). Schools must test at least 95% of the various individual student groups, including students with disabilities and those with limited English Proficiency. Accommodations may include reading tests to students or allowing extra time to interpret tests. In the future, the Department will offer native language versions of the assessments for limited English proficient groups numbering 5000 or more; and

3. One additional performance measure depending on grade span:
 - a. Elementary/middle schools must have 90% average student attendance or show an attendance rate improvement over the prior year.
 - b. High schools must have an 80% graduation rate or show improvement in the graduation rate from the prior year. To graduate, students must demonstrate proficiency in reading, writing and math. To measure such proficiency, a school entity may use either: 1) proficient or better performance on the PSSA administered in grade 11 or 12; or 2) proficient or better performance on a local assessment aligned with the academic standards and the PSSA. Local assessments may be a single exam or a combination of assessment strategies, but proficiency is expected to be comparable with proficiency on the PSSA.^{vi}
 - c. Districts must meet, or show growth in, both the attendance and graduation rate targets across all schools in their jurisdictions.

The three criteria listed above apply not only to the school or district as a whole, but also to the performance of subgroups, including racial/ethnic categories, low-income students, students with disabilities, and English Language Learners.

Table 2: AYP Requirements for Student Performance on Reading and Math PSSA^{vii}							
Year	2002-04	2005-07	2008-10	2011	2012	2013	2014
Percent Proficient in Reading	45	54	63	72	81	91	100
Percent Proficient in Math	35	45	56	67	78	89	100

As Table 2 shows, the Commonwealth requires that, by 2014, all its students must reach the proficient level or above in reading and math. Between now and 2014, the state has established an escalating series of intermediate performance goals designed to prompt schools and districts to move toward the ultimate goal of 100% proficiency. Schools must meet or exceed these intermediate yearly goals to make AYP each year.

Pennsylvania has also established a series of consequences for failing to reach the AYP goals shown in Table 2. These consequences apply to both schools and districts. In the first year of not meeting AYP, a school or district is placed in “warning” status. Warning means that the school fell short of the AYP targets but has another year to achieve them. These schools are not subject to consequences. Instead, they are required to examine, and where necessary modify, their improvement strategies so they will meet targets next year. If a school does not meet its AYP for two consecutive years, it is designated as needing improvement and is placed in one of the categories described in Table 3.^{viii} A school or district can exit School Improvement or Corrective Action status by meeting AYP targets for two consecutive years.

Table 3: Consequences for Failing to Make AYP

School Improvement I – AYP failure for 2 consecutive years

If a school does not meet its AYP for two years in a row, students will be eligible for school choice, school officials will develop an improvement plan to turn around the school, and the school will receive technical assistance to help it get back on the right track. The school choice provision means that the school/district is required to offer parents the option of sending their child to another public school (including charter schools) within the school district. If no other school within the district is available, a district must, to the extent practical, enter into a cooperative agreement with another district that will allow students to transfer.

School Improvement II – AYP failure for 3 consecutive years

If a school or district does not meet its AYP for three years in a row, it must continue to offer public school choice and plan improvements. Additionally, the school or district will need to offer supplemental education services such as tutoring, after-school, or summer school support. The district will be responsible for paying for these additional services.

Corrective Action I – AYP failure for 4 consecutive years

A school or district is categorized in Corrective Action I when it does not meet its AYP for four consecutive years. At this level, schools are eligible for various levels of technical assistance and are subject to escalating consequences (e.g., changes in curriculum, leadership, professional development).

Corrective Action II – AYP failure for 5 consecutive years

If a school or district does not meet its AYP for five years in a row, it is subject to governance changes such as reconstitution, chartering, and privatization. In the meantime, improvement plans, school choice, and supplemental education services are still required.

ⁱ Source: Pennsylvania Department of Education. Retrieved January 5, 2007 from the World Wide Web. http://www.pde.state.pa.us/a_and_t/site/default.asp

ⁱⁱ Source: Pennsylvania Department of Education. Retrieved January 5, 2007 from the World Wide Web. <http://www.pde.state.pa.us/pas/cwp/view.asp?a=3&Q=94580&pasNav=6132|&pasNav=6325>

ⁱⁱⁱ Source: Pennsylvania Department of Education. Retrieved January 5, 2007 from the World Wide Web. http://www.pde.state.pa.us/a_and_t/site/default.asp

^{iv} Source: Pennsylvania Department of Education. Retrieved January 8, 2007 from the World Wide Web. http://www.pde.state.pa.us/stateboard_ed/cwp/view.asp?a=3&Q=76716

^v Pennsylvania Consolidated State Application Accountability Workbook, (Revised May 30, 2006), page 55. http://www.pde.state.pa.us/nclb/lib/nclb/Accountability_Workbook_revised_2006.pdf

^{vi} Source: Pennsylvania Department of Education. Retrieved January 8, 2007 from the World Wide Web. <http://www.pde.state.pa.us/k12/cwp/view.asp?A=11&Q=85767>;

<http://www.pde.state.pa.us/k12/cwp/view.asp?a=85&Q=74007>

^{vii} Source: Pennsylvania Department of Education. Retrieved January 5, 2007 from the World Wide Web. <http://www.pde.state.pa.us/pas/cwp/view.asp?a=3&Q=94580&pasNav=6132|&pasNav=6325>

^{viii} *Id.*