

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

What does state testing tell us?

Public school students across the Commonwealth spend a tremendous amount of time each year preparing for — and taking — PSSAs, the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment tests.

Although these tests are supposed to make schools accountable, the state doesn't provide much guidance in interpreting scores. Looking for trends? The state posts on its website the results for all 500 school districts each year, but there's no direct way to compare them over time.

To create the chart below, I had to cut and paste test scores from ten different years posted on the state website. The chart shows that some students did well, some were mid-

dling, and some did poorly. If there's more useful information to be gleaned, it escapes me.

Moreover, the state re-norms the tests from time to time, or changes them altogether. In the 2012-2013 school year, at the high school level, the state transitioned from PSSAs in math and reading to a different kind of test, the Keystone (in literature, algebra, and biology).



Commentary by
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At first, you had to pass the Keystones to graduate. Now that's on hold while the state Department of Education rethinks its graduation requirements.

The state has mandated PSSAs since 1993. Are students doing the same, better or worse? There's really no way to tell — but in the meantime, we keep on testing.

School year	Subject	Number scored	Pct. Advanced / Proficient	Pct. Basic	Pct. Below Basic
2015-2016	Literature	133	47.4	42.9	9.8
2015-2016	Algebra I	131	45.8	40.5	13.7
2015-2016	Biology	136	49.2	28.7	22.1
2014-2015	Literature	154	57.15	25.97	16.88
2014-2015	Algebra I	157	59.87	29.94	10.19
2014-2015	Biology	160	53.13	28.13	18.75
2013-2014	Literature	152	72.4	15.8	11.8
2013-2014	Algebra I	155	59.3	29.0	11.6
2013-2014	Biology	155	54.2	31.6	14.2
2012-2013	Literature	156	65.4	27.6	7.1
2012-2013	Algebra I	157	50.4	38.2	11.5
2012-2013	Biology	157	46.5	30.6	22.9
2012-2013	Reading	185	66	27	7
2012-2013	Math	182	50	38	12
2011-2012	Reading	185	40.5	21.1	19.5
2011-2012	Math	182	54.9	20.3	24.7
2010-2011	Reading	178	59.4	24.7	23.0
2010-2011	Math	178	46.1	27.0	27.0
2009-2010	Reading	165	62.3	20.0	20.6
2009-2010	Math	161	52.8	16.8	30.4
2008-2009	Reading	159	62.3	19.5	18.2
2008-2009	Math	157	43.9	24.2	31.8
2007-2008	Reading	160	49.4	17.5	33.1
2007-2008	Math	160	36.9	25.6	37.5
2006-2007	Reading	185	57.9	18.4	23.8
2006-2007	Math	185	48.7	24.9	26.5

CHART ABOVE shows the test scores of Pottstown High School 11th graders going back 10 years. PSSAs were given until the 2012-2013 school year, when they were replaced by Keystone tests at the high school level. Some students took both tests in 2012-2013.