

## A Summary of District-Wide Assessments Administered to School District of Philadelphia Students During the 2021-22 School Year

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### Overview

This brief describes the District-wide tests administered at the School District of Philadelphia (SDP) during the 2021-22 school year and provides details about student participation.<sup>1</sup>

After implementing virtual and hybrid instruction during 2020-21, SDP returned to in-person learning in the 2021-22 school year. Although surges in Covid-19 such as the Omicron wave led to short-term pivots to virtual learning, most SDP students were taught in person at their schools in 2021-22.

To assess student learning during the 2021-22 school year, SDP administered Star assessments to all grades, K-12, in four assessments windows: Fall, Winter 1, Winter 2, and Spring. Students were tested while at school in person (with the exception of Philadelphia Virtual Academy students). Schools used the reading and math assessment results to inform instruction and determine which students required intervention, and the Board of Education used the results for progress monitoring throughout the year. The results were also analyzed in publicly available briefs and reports.

With the return to in-person learning in 2021-22, SDP schools resumed the usual process of administering state-required standardized tests in person.<sup>2</sup> By comparison, in 2020-21, PSSA and ACCESS tests were

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<sup>1</sup> For more information about the Office of Assessment, see: <https://www.philasd.org/era/assessment/>. To access current and past assessment calendars, visit: <https://www.philasd.org/era/assessment/calendar/>

<sup>2</sup> Regularly administered state tests are: Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) for English (grades 3-8), Math (grades 3-8), and Science (grades 4 and 8); Pennsylvania Alternate System of Assessment (PASA) for English, Math and Science for select special education students in grades 3-8 and 11; Keystones for end-of-course assessment for high school Algebra I, Literature, and Biology; and Assessing Communication and Comprehension in English State to State (ACCESS) for English Learners' English proficiency levels.

only administered to students who were enrolled in the hybrid education program and attended in person during the spring testing window, while spring 2021 Keystone exams were mostly administered in fall 2021, when students returned to school in person for the new school year.

## Interim Assessments

### Star

Beginning in the 2020-21 school year, SDP implemented a universal K-12 interim assessment program. That year, all schools across the District assessed students in both reading and math using aimswebPlus for grades K-5 and Star for grades 6-12. In the 2021-22 school year, SDP began using Star exams for all grades and stopped using aimswebPlus as a universal screener for grades K-5.<sup>3</sup>

In the 2020-21 school year, before the phased transition to hybrid education in the spring, Star assessments were administered virtually, with students completing them from home. Once hybrid education began in spring, students attending school in person took the tests while at school. In 2021-22, all students attended school in person, and Star tests were given in person at school.

SDP administered five different types of Star assessments to students in grades K-12 during the 2021-22 school year: Star Reading Curriculum Based Measures (CBM), Star Math CBM, Star Early Literacy, Star Reading, and Star Math.<sup>4</sup> Star Reading and Math CBM assessments are one-minute literacy and numeracy skills tests that teachers implement one-on-one with students in grades K-5 (Reading) and K-3 (Math). Star Early Literacy (SEL), a computer adaptive test (CAT), is a literacy and numeracy assessment for grades K-2. Once students reach a unified scale score<sup>5</sup> of 852 on the SEL or reach 3<sup>rd</sup> grade (whichever comes first), they move on to the two other CATs: Star Reading and Star Math, both of which are used through grade 12.

In 2021-22, Star Reading and Math assessments were administered during four testing windows (Table 1). As data from each testing cycle became available, the Office of Research and Evaluation produced analyses focusing on student participation and performance, both overall for the District and for student demographic groups.<sup>6</sup> Data from the Star assessments were also instrumental in monitoring progress toward the Goals and Guardrails adopted by the Board of Education.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> In this brief, special education students are included only in the grade range the assessment is required for all students. Spanish language tests are included only for math and not reading. Star Spanish results are not included for high school grades because Star Spanish is not yet nationally normed, and a National Percentile Rank (NPR) cannot be assigned to these scores. Tier performance is assigned according to NPR.

<sup>4</sup> For information on metrics used in calculating Star scores, see: <https://www.philasd.org/research/2022/06/09/star-tests-in-the-school-district-of-philadelphia-a-summary-of-metrics-that-describe-achievement-and-growth/>. For participation in and performance on Star Reading and Math tests throughout the 2021-22 school year, see: <https://www.philasd.org/research/2022/08/18/participation-and-performance-on-the-star-assessments-at-the-school-district-of-philadelphia-2021-22/>

<sup>5</sup> For more on the Star Unified Scale, see the documentation by Renaissance, available at: <https://renaissance.widen.net/s/w6p9f5pcpm/r63395>

<sup>6</sup> For Office of Research and Evaluation analyses of Star data, see: <https://www.philasd.org/research/category/assessments/star/>

<sup>7</sup> For information about the Goals and Guardrails, see: <https://www.philasd.org/goalsandguardrails/>

Table 1. Testing windows and participation rates for Star Reading and Math assessments in 2021-22

	Testing Window	Number of Eligible Students	Reading Assessment Participation Rate	Math Assessment Participation Rate
<i>Fall</i>	9/8/2021 - 10/8/2021	114,405	89%	87%
<i>Winter 1</i>	12/1/2021 - 12/23/2021	114,424	86%	83%
<i>Winter 2</i>	3/7/2022 - 3/31/2022	113,617	88%	86%
<i>Spring</i>	5/16/2022 - 6/14/2022	113,349	79%	78%

**Source:** Qlik Academic Screeners, v.3.5.5, "Participation Details" sheet, accessed January 3, 2023.

**Note:** This table includes data on SDP schools only.

## Biology Benchmark Testing

The Biology Benchmark is an online instructional assessment administered to grades 8-12 students who are enrolled in a Biology course. Aligned with the Biology scope and sequence, it has traditionally been offered to Biology teachers as a recommended resource aimed at informing instruction. In the 2021-22 school year, the Biology Benchmark became required, and was offered in three testing windows: Fall (November 10–24), Winter (January 18–28), and Spring (March 21–April 1). For each window, the Biology Benchmark tests students on material taught within the most recent quarter. The 2021-22 school year was the first year that students had the option of taking the test in Spanish.<sup>8</sup> Remote testing was also permitted, although schools were advised to test in person whenever possible. More students participated in 2021-22 than in 2020-21 (Table 2).

Table 2. Number of students who took the Biology Benchmark tests in the 2018-19, 2019-20, 2020-21 and 2021-22 school years

Testing Window	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	
<i>Fall</i>	6,576	6,482	3,739	English	6,056
				Spanish	193
				Total	6,249
<i>Winter</i>	6,150	6,018	4,173	English	5,175
				Spanish	151
				Total	5,326
<i>Spring</i>	5,668	<i>cancelled</i>	3,788	English	5,312
				Spanish	215
				Total	5,527

**Source:** SchoolNet, Assessment Dashboard, accessed January 21, 2022, February 22, 2022, and April 11, 2022.

**Note:** This table includes data on SDP schools only.

<sup>8</sup> In 2021-22, some bilingual students took part of the Biology Benchmark test in English and part of it in Spanish. In the summary in Table 2, each of these students was assigned to a specific version of the test to ensure that the two groups were as mutually exclusive as possible, though there might have been some overlap.

## Summative End-of-Course Exams

### Civics Test

In 2021-22, SDP administered state-mandated Civics testing, required for students enrolled in Social Science, Civics, AP US Government and Politics, and IB History courses in grades 9-12. The tests were administered in three testing windows: November 8–January 25 (for non-traditional schedules), February 7–February 25 (the main testing window), and April 25–May 13 (for spring block and make-up tests). Remote testing was permitted, although schools were advised to test in person whenever possible. The 2021-22 school year was the second year the Civics test was administered, as required by PDE Act 35, and 6,349 students participated (Table 3).

### International Baccalaureate Exams

International Baccalaureate (IB) courses offer college-level credits, and IB students take end-of-course exams to show their mastery of the course material. For the 2020-21 school year, the IB program allowed a dual route to course completion: a non-exam route (where the final determination was based on the teachers' evaluation of the coursework) and an exam-route.<sup>9</sup> For 2021-22, IB exams were administered in person. All SDP schools with IB courses gave the IB exams in 2021-22, and 363 students took the exams (Table 3). As a reference, 425 SDP students took the IB exams in 2018-19 (before Covid-19).<sup>10</sup>

### Advanced Placement Exams

Advanced Placement (AP) courses provide an opportunity for high school students to earn college-level credits, and SDP offers AP courses in multiple subjects. The College Board administered end-of-course Advanced Placement exams between May 2–May 13 to students in grades 9-12 who were enrolled in AP courses in the 2021-22 school year. The number of District and Alternative program students who took AP tests in 2021-22 was 4,266, compared to 3,793 in 2020-21, 3,773 in 2019-20, and 4,090 in 2018-19 (Table 3).<sup>11</sup>

### NOCTI (National Occupational Competency Testing Institute) Assessments

The National Occupational Competency Testing Institute assessments are administered to students enrolled in Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses. NOCTI assessments include a written pre-test in the fall and a post-test in the spring that consists of two parts: an online test and a performance test. In 2021-22, pre-tests were administered between October 18–October 29, and the post-tests were administered between April 4–April 30. The number of students who took NOCTI tests in 2021-22 was 1,221, compared to 176 in 2020-21, 11 in 2019-20, and 1,187 in 2018-19 (Table 3).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> For details on this dual assessment model, see: <https://ibo.org/programmes/diploma-programme/assessment-and-exams/understanding-assessment-during-covid-19/>

<sup>10</sup> The participation level for 2018-19 might not match the numbers from previous Assessment Briefs because it has been updated with the latest available information.

<sup>11</sup> These participation levels might not match the numbers from previous Assessment Briefs because they have been updated with the latest available information.

<sup>12</sup> These participation levels might not match the numbers from previous Assessment Briefs because they have been updated with the latest available information.

Table 3. Number of students who took the Civics test, International Baccalaureate exams, Advanced Placement exams, and NOCTI assessments in the 2018-19, 2019-20, 2020-21, and 2021-22 school years

	<b>2018-19</b>	<b>2019-20</b>	<b>2020-21</b>	<b>2021-22</b>
Civics Test	<i>Not administered</i>	<i>Not administered</i>	5,543	6,349
International Baccalaureate Exams	425	378	404	363
Advanced Placement Exams	4,090	3,773	3,793	4,266
NOCTI Assessments	1,187	11	176	1,221

**Source:** Qlik, Postsecondary Readiness application, v.1.1.2, “Details” sheet, accessed March 9, 2023.

**Note:** This table includes data on SDP schools only.

## State Standardized Assessments

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) directs the administration of PSSA/PASA, Keystone, and ACCESS exams each year. These tests are all secure and designed to be administered in person. The details of administration and participation in each state test are outlined below.

### PSSA and PASA

The Pennsylvania System of School Assessment exams (PSSAs) are standardized end-of-year assessments in English Language Arts (ELA), Math, and Science whose results are used for district, state, and federal accountability. The ELA and Math tests are administered to grades 3-8, and the Science test is administered to grades 4 and 8, in the spring of each school year. The Pennsylvania Alternate State Assessment (PASA) is an alternative assessment designed for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who are unable to participate meaningfully in the PSSA or Keystone exams, even with appropriate accommodations.

In the 2019-20 school year, PDE cancelled the PSSA and PASA exams when school buildings across the state were closed due to Covid-19. During the 2020-21 school year, PDE encouraged administration of the tests to students whenever they could be completed in person in the spring or in the fall of the following year. Due to the unusual conditions under which these assessments were administered, the 2020-21 results were not used for accountability purposes. In the 2021-22 school year, SDP administered the PSSA, as usual, between April 25–May 13, and the PASA between March 14–May 20. Participation in PSSA/PASA tests in the 2021-22 school year was lower than in 2018-19, the last pre-pandemic year (Table 4).

Table 4. Number of students who took the PSSA by grade, 2021-22 and 2018-19 (pre-pandemic)

Test	Grade	Number of Students Tested, 2021-22	Percent of Eligible Students Tested, 2021-22	Number of Students Tested, 2018-19	Percent of Eligible Students Tested, 2018-19
PSSA - English Language Arts	3	8,063	93.7%	9,662	97.4%
	4	8,062	93.4%	9,670	97.3%
	5	7,943	93.9%	9,488	97.7%
	6	7,391	92.2%	8,726	98.1%
	7	7,365	92.2%	7,859	97.3%
	8	7,402	89.5%	7,803	95.7%
	<b>Total</b>		<b>46,226</b>	<b>92.5%</b>	<b>53,208</b>
PSSA - Math	3	8,172	95.0%	9,728	98.0%
	4	8,150	94.4%	9,708	97.7%
	5	8,007	94.8%	9,500	97.9%
	6	7,449	93.1%	8,727	98.1%
	7	7,416	93.0%	7,864	97.4%
	8	7,365	89.2%	7,771	95.3%
	<b>Total</b>		<b>46,559</b>	<b>93.3%</b>	<b>53,298</b>
PSSA - Science	4	8,117	94.2%	9,710	97.8%
	8	7,306	88.5%	7,759	95.1%
	<b>Total</b>		<b>15,423</b>	<b>91.4%</b>	<b>17,496</b>

Source: Qlik PSSA & Keystone application, v.2.2.1, "PSSA Participation: Multi-Year Trends" sheet (modified), accessed January 3, 2023.

Note: Eligible students in this table include all students enrolled in that grade per PDE records and attributed to a District K-12 or Alternative school, for each respective school year reported. *Students attributed to the District but not to a specific school are excluded.* This table includes data on SDP schools only.

## Keystone Exams

Keystone exams are end-of-course assessments designed to assess proficiency in Algebra I, Literature, and Biology. At SDP, Keystone exams are typically administered in winter and spring to students who take those courses in grades 7-12. Most SDP students take the exams in the spring. In the 2019-20 school year, only the winter administration was completed. In the 2020-21 school year, Keystone exams were not administered in winter or spring. Instead, 2020-21 exams were administered between September 20–September 30 of the 2021-22 school year. Although the exams were administered after the students had returned to school buildings in person, participation in 2020-21 Keystone exams was much lower than what it is in a typical year, such as the last usual administration in 2018-19. The 2021-22 Keystone exams were administered in person, following their regular schedule, between January 3–February 4 and between May 16–May 27 (Table 5).<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> For more information about Keystone Exams, see: <https://www.education.pa.gov/K-12/Assessment%20and%20Accountability/Keystones/Pages/default.aspx>

Starting in the 2022-23 school year, high school seniors in Pennsylvania will need to satisfy the requirements in one of five new pathways in order to graduate. One of the pathways involves scoring Proficient or Advanced on the three Keystone exams. Another pathway involves taking all three Keystone exams and scoring Proficient or Advanced on at least one exam, as well as earning a score of Basic on the other Keystone exams and receiving a minimum composite score of 4452 across all three subjects.<sup>14</sup> With these new graduation requirements in place, it is likely that in 2022-23 there will be a heightened level of focus on Keystone exams among students and their families, as well as school administrators and teachers.

Table 5. Number of students who took Keystone exams by grade, 2021-22 and 2018-19

Test	Grade	Number of Students Tested, 2021-22	Number of Students Tested, 2018-19
Keystone - Literature	Not specified	7	39
	8	0	0
	9	244	302
	10	6,143	6,565
	11	2,438	2,214
	12	150	119
	<b>Total</b>	<b>8,982</b>	<b>9,239</b>
Keystone - Algebra I	Not specified	2	34
	7	1	66
	8	1,194	1,779
	9	7,291	6,759
	10	3,689	3,439
	11	1,997	1,857
	12	140	136
<b>Total</b>	<b>14,314</b>	<b>14,070</b>	
Keystone - Biology	Not specified	3	30
	8	31	33
	9	2,966	3,040
	10	4,106	4,206
	11	2,521	2,162
	12	170	127
	<b>Total</b>	<b>9,797</b>	<b>9,598</b>

Source: Qlik PSSA & Keystone application, v.2.2.1, "Performance Details Table" sheet, accessed January 19, 2023.

Note: This table includes data on both SDP schools and Alternative schools.

<sup>14</sup> Students who are only able to take two Keystone exams because an exam administration is cancelled can also satisfy the new graduation requirements by scoring Proficient or Advanced on one and Basic on the other, and achieving a composite score of 2939 or higher.

## **ACCESS for ELLs**

ACCESS for ELLs is a required, standards-based instrument for the annual assessment of English language proficiency (reading, writing, listening, and speaking). It is administered annually, typically in January, to identify the students who need supports in English proficiency, as well as to track the development of English proficiency and to exit students from English as a Second Language (ESL) programming. An alternative version is administered for English Learners with severe cognitive disabilities.<sup>15</sup>

Unlike other state standardized tests, 2019-20 ACCESS administration was completed by the time school buildings closed due to Covid-19. In the 2019-20 administration, 16,663 students took ACCESS, including the alternative version. In 2020-21, ACCESS was administered to English Learners who were attending in person during the hybrid phase. During this period, 2,401 students were tested.<sup>16</sup> In 2021-22, with schools returning to in-person instruction, ACCESS was administered to 17,337 students.

## **Other Screeners and Tests**

### **KEI (Kindergarten Entry Inventory)**

The Pennsylvania Kindergarten Entry Inventory (KEI) is a kindergarten readiness tool developed by the PA Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) that teachers use to measure the readiness of every incoming kindergarten student within the first 45 days of school. In the fall of 2020-21, a modified version of the KEI was implemented by kindergarten teachers based on their virtual interactions with students. In 2021-22, teachers returned to administering the KEI in person.

### **NNAT (Naglieri Nonverbal Ability Test)**

NNAT is a screener administered to 2<sup>nd</sup> grade students to assess general ability. Results are used to identify students who will be evaluated further for giftedness. In 2020-21, NNAT was not administered. During the 2021-22 school year, this screener was administered to 4<sup>th</sup> graders (the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade cohort from 2019-20 whose screening window was truncated due to Covid-19 school closures), then to 3<sup>rd</sup> graders (the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade cohort from 2020-21 who were virtual/hybrid), and then to current 2<sup>nd</sup> graders in 2021-22, in that order.

### **NAEP (The National Assessment of Educational Progress)**

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)/Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA)<sup>17</sup> is a nationally representative assessment of what U.S. students in grades 4, 8, and 12 know and can do. They are administered in alternating years, with one or the other administered each year, and not all subjects are tested at each cycle; the most frequent NAEP/TUDA tests are in

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<sup>15</sup> For more information on ACCESS for ELLs, see: <https://wida.wisc.edu/assess/access/tests>. For more information on PDE's approach to educating English Learners, see: <https://www.education.pa.gov/Policy-Funding/BECS/PACode/Pages/EducatingELs.aspx>

<sup>16</sup> The Issue Brief summarizing 2020-21 assessments reported that 2,672 students completed the ACCESS test domains in 2020-21. These numbers were pulled from the PDE reports available at the time. The 2020-21 figures reported here are compiled after eligibility and District attribution business rules were applied.

<sup>17</sup> For details, see: <https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/about/>, <https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/tuda/>, and <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/lit/about/lit-reading/?age=9>



reading and math. Science, U.S. history, civics, geography, economics, the arts, and similar topics are periodically assessed as well. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, NAEP was administered during the spring semester of even-numbered years to students in a small number of schools in the District—usually between one and 10 schools, and the TUDA was administered during the spring semester of odd-numbered years to students in a large sample of schools—usually about 100 schools. In 2020-21, administration of the TUDA in was postponed. In 2021-22, the TUDA was administered to students in grades 4 and 8 between January 24–March 31, testing students in reading and math.<sup>18</sup> The NAEP/LTT is scheduled to be administered in the spring of the 2022-23 school year.

## **SAT and ACT**

The SAT is composed of three tests (reading, writing and language, and math) that assess academic readiness for college. The ACT is a national college admissions examination that consists of subject area tests in English, math, reading, science, and writing. These tests are typically taken by students in grades 11 and 12. The SDP-sponsored administrations were cancelled in the 2020-21 school year. In 2021-22, the SDP-sponsored administrations of the SAT took place on the following dates: August 28, October 2, November 6, December 4, March 12, May 7, and June 4. The SDP-sponsored ACT was administered on these dates: September 11, October 23, December 11, February 12, April 2, June 11, and July 16.

## **PSAT/NMSQT and PSAT 8/9**

The PSAT/NMSQT (Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test) is a test administered to students in grades 10 and 11 as a practice for the SAT. Another version, the PSAT 8/9, is administered to students in grades 8 and 9, and is also a practice for the SAT. The SDP-sponsored administrations of all PSAT tests were cancelled in the 2020-21 school year. In 2021-22, the SDP-sponsored PSAT/NMSQT was administered on October 13 and 16, with a make-up option on October 26. The SDP-sponsored PSAT 8/9 was administered between September 20–January 28.

## **Conclusions**

After the virtual, then hybrid, teaching and learning put in place in the 2020-21 school year, SDP returned to fully in-person instruction in 2021-22. Tests that were cancelled for the 2020-21 school year were resumed in 2021-22, and in some cases, tests for cohorts of students that would have taken them in 2020-21 were delayed until 2021-22. Tests that were administered online in 2020-21 returned to in-person administration in 2021-22. Participation rates for most tests were higher in 2021-22 than in 2020-21, approaching their pre-pandemic levels.

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<sup>18</sup> For 2022 SDP NAEP/TUDA results, see: <https://www.philasd.org/blog/2022/10/24/naep2022/>