

PSSA Performance by Primary Disability Category, 2022-23

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Key Findings

- Approximately 20% of students in grades 3-8 who completed the PSSA/PASA in 2022-23 had an active Individualized Education Program (IEP).
- Between 4.1% and 34.4% of students with an active IEP scored Proficient or Advanced on the PSSA/PASA ELA, depending on primary disability category.
- Between 1.5% and 30.8% of students with an active IEP scored Proficient or Advanced on the PSSA/PASA Math, depending on primary disability category.
- Up to 45.7% of students with an active IEP scored Proficient or Advanced on the PSSA/PASA Science, depending on primary disability category.

Overview

The Pennsylvania System of School Assessments (PSSAs) are standardized assessments administered annually to students in Pennsylvania. The PSSA English Language Arts (ELA) and PSSA Math are administered to students in grades 3-8, and the PSSA Science is administered to students in grades 4 and 8. A recent data brief described PSSA performance for all School District of Philadelphia (SDP) students who took the assessments during the 2022-23 school year.¹ The current data brief reports on 2022-23 PSSA performance for SDP students who qualify for special education services and have an active Individualized Education Program (IEP).² Results are summarized by primary disability category.

Special Education and the PSSAs in SDP

The population of SDP students who qualify for special education services is diverse, and students can be classified with one or more disabilities defined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; see Box 1).³ IDEA requires that all students with disabilities are included in all general state and district assessments, and students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who are unable to participate in the PSSA even with accommodations may qualify to take the Pennsylvania Alternate System of Assessment (PASA) instead of the PSSA.⁴ The PASA is available in ELA, Math,

¹ See: <https://www.philasd.org/research/2023/12/22/pssa-performance-trends-in-sdp-2018-19-to-2022-23/>

² For more information on eligibility for special education services see:

<https://www.philasd.org/specializedservices/#specialed>

³ See: <https://www.philasd.org/research/2021/10/18/special-education-in-the-school-district-of-philadelphia-recognizing-the-landscape-2019-20/>

⁴ For more information see: https://www.philasd.org/era/wp-content/uploads/sites/865/2023/02/PASA_Parent-Guide.pdf

and Science. Like the PSSA, it is aligned with Pennsylvania core standards, but the breadth and depth of content covered is reduced.

Students can score in one of four performance levels on the PSSA or PASA. On the PSSA, the performance levels are Advanced, Proficient, Basic, and Below Basic. On the PASA, students can score Advanced, At Target, Approaching Target, and Emerging. The Advanced and Proficient levels on the PSSA and the Advanced and At Target levels on the PASA indicate that students met the academic standards assessed by each test.⁵ In the following tables, performance levels from the PSSA are PASA are combined as follows:

- Advanced: Advanced on the PSSA or PASA
- Proficient: Proficient on the PSSA or At Target on the PASA
- Basic: Basic on the PSSA or Approaching Target on the PASA
- Below Basic: Below Basic on the PSSA or Emerging on the PASA

PSSA/PASA Results

In the 2022-23 school year, approximately 20% of students who completed the PSSA/PASA assessments had an active IEP (Tables 1-3).⁶ Moreover, about 21% of students receiving special education services took the PASA instead of the PSSA. The most common primary disability among test takers was Specific Learning Disability followed by Autism, Other Health Impairment, and Intellectual Disability.

For most primary disability categories, the percentage of students scoring Proficient or Advanced on each PSSA/PASA subject test was lower than for the District overall (Tables 1-3). However, performance also varied by category, sometimes meeting or exceeding District levels. For ELA, Proficient/Advanced rates ranged from 4.1% to 34.4% (Table 1); for Math, Proficient/Advanced rates ranged from 1.5% to 30.8% (Table 2); and for Science, Proficient/Advanced rates ranged from 0.0% to 45.7% (Table 3).

Box 1: Disability Categories Defined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

- Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Deaf-Blindness
- Deafness
- Emotional Disturbance
- Hearing Impairment
- Intellectual Disability
- Multiple Disabilities
- Orthopedic Impairment
- Other Health Impairment
- Specific Learning Disability
- Speech or Language Impairment
- Traumatic Brain Injury
- Visual Impairment, including Blindness

Source:

<https://www.philasd.org/specializedservices/#specialied>

⁵ PSSA: <https://www.education.pa.gov/Documents/K-12/Assessment%20and%20Accountability/PSSA/Technical%20Reports/2022%20PSSA%20Technical%20Report.pdf>; PASA: https://dynamiclearningmaps.org/sites/default/files/documents/Manuals_Blueprints/2021-2022_YE_Technical_Manual_PA_Supplement.pdf

⁶ Percentages are based on SDP records in quarter 4 of 2022-23. Does not include students whose primary disability was Gifted, but may include students whose secondary disability was Gifted.

Table 1. Performance level distribution on the PSSA/PASA English Language Arts by primary disability, 2022-23

Category	n	Performance Level				
		Advanced + Proficient	Advanced	Proficient	Basic	Below Basic
District Overall	47,635	34.0%	9.0%	25.1%	39.6%	26.4%
Students with an active Individualized Educational Program (n = 9,733)						
Autism	1,633	34.4%	8.1%	26.3%	29.4%	36.3%
Deaf-Blindness	-	-	-	-	-	-
Emotional Disturbance	661	6.5%	0.3%	6.2%	37.8%	55.7%
Hearing Impaired including Deafness	101	25.7%	4.0%	21.8%	27.7%	46.5%
Intellectual Disability	1,075	12.7%	0.7%	12.1%	27.3%	60.0%
Multiple Disabilities	82	4.9%	0.0%	4.9%	2.4%	92.7%
Orthopedic Impairment	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other Health Impairment	1,488	7.6%	1.0%	6.6%	38.1%	54.3%
Specific Learning Disability	4,092	4.1%	0.3%	3.8%	39.6%	56.3%
Speech or Language Impairment	560	28.2%	6.6%	21.6%	39.5%	32.3%
Traumatic Brain Injury	-	-	-	-	-	-
Visual Impairment including Blindness	-	-	-	-	-	-

Note: Cells with a dash (-) indicate results are suppressed. Primary disability categories with fewer than 20 students are suppressed. Includes students in grades 3-8 who took the PSSA/PASA, were attributed to the School District of Philadelphia (SDP), and had an active Individualized Educational Program (IEP) in quarter 4 of the 2022-23 school year. This table excludes students whose primary disability was Gifted but may include students whose secondary disability was Gifted. IEP and primary disability categories are based on SDP records. Advanced includes students who scored Advanced on either the PSSA or PASA; Proficient includes students who scored Proficient on the PSSA or At Target on the PASA; Basic includes students who scored Basic on the PSSA or Approaching Target on the PASA; Below Basic includes students who scored Below Basic on the PSSA or Emerging on the PASA. Approximately 21% of students with an active IEP completed the PASA.

Source: Qlik PSSA & Keystones App, accessed 12-8-23; Qlik Report Library PSSA & Keystones, accessed 11-15-23; Qlik Report Library Student Characteristics, accessed 11-20-23

Table 2. Performance level distribution on the PSSA/PASA Math by primary disability, 2022-23

Category	n	Performance Level				
		Advanced + Proficient	Advanced	Proficient	Basic	Below Basic
District Overall	48,380	20.7%	7.5%	13.2%	22.5%	56.8%
Students with an active Individualized Educational Program (n = 9,781)						
Autism	1,638	30.8%	13.8%	17.0%	18.2%	51.0%
Deaf-Blindness	-	-	-	-	-	-
Emotional Disturbance	655	2.4%	0.5%	2.0%	7.3%	90.2%
Hearing Impaired including Deafness	100	11.0%	3.0%	8.0%	17.0%	72.0%
Intellectual Disability	1,082	10.5%	2.0%	8.5%	16.5%	72.9%
Multiple Disabilities	81	6.2%	0.0%	6.2%	1.2%	92.6%
Orthopedic Impairment	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other Health Impairment	1,498	3.2%	0.5%	2.7%	10.5%	86.2%
Specific Learning Disability	4,121	1.5%	0.3%	1.2%	7.0%	91.5%
Speech or Language Impairment	567	20.8%	7.2%	13.6%	26.5%	52.7%
Traumatic Brain Injury	-	-	-	-	-	-
Visual Impairment including Blindness	-	-	-	-	-	-

Note: Cells with a dash (-) indicate results are suppressed. Primary disability categories with fewer than 20 students are suppressed. Includes students in grades 3-8 who took the PSSA/PASA, were attributed to the School District of Philadelphia (SDP), and have an active Individualized Educational Program (IEP) in quarter 4 of the 2022-23 school year. This table excludes students whose primary disability was Gifted but may include students whose secondary disability was Gifted. IEP and primary disability categories are based on SDP records. Advanced includes students who scored Advanced on either the PSSA or PASA; Proficient includes students who scored Proficient on the PSSA or At Target on the PASA; Basic includes students who scored Basic on the PSSA or Approaching Target on the PASA; Below Basic includes students who scored Below Basic on the PSSA or Emerging on the PASA. Approximately 21% of students with an active IEP completed the PASA.

Source: Qlik PSSA & Keystones App, accessed 12-8-23; Qlik Report Library PSSA & Keystones, accessed 11-15-23; Qlik Report Library Student Characteristics, accessed 11-20-23

Table 3. Performance level distribution on the PSSA/PASA Science by primary disability, 2022-23

Category	n	Performance Level				
		Advanced + Proficient	Advanced	Proficient	Basic	Below Basic
District Overall	16,041	40.2%	12.7%	27.4%	26.2%	33.6%
Students with an active Individualized Educational Program (n = 3,220)						
Autism	498	29.7%	7.6%	22.1%	22.9%	47.4%
Deaf-Blindness	-	-	-	-	-	-
Emotional Disturbance	215	9.8%	0.5%	9.3%	26.0%	64.2%
Hearing Impaired including Deafness	38	15.8%	5.3%	10.5%	28.9%	55.3%
Intellectual Disability	373	9.9%	0.3%	9.7%	18.5%	71.6%
Multiple Disabilities	23	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Orthopedic Impairment	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other Health Impairment	501	10.4%	1.4%	9.0%	25.5%	64.1%
Specific Learning Disability	1,387	10.2%	1.1%	9.1%	25.5%	64.3%
Speech or Language Impairment	173	45.7%	10.4%	35.3%	35.3%	19.1%
Traumatic Brain Injury	-	-	-	-	-	-
Visual Impairment including Blindness	-	-	-	-	-	-

Note: Cells with a dash (-) indicate results are suppressed. Primary disability categories with fewer than 20 students are suppressed. Includes students in grades 3-8 who took the PSSA/PASA, were attributed to the School District of Philadelphia (SDP), and have an active Individualized Educational Program (IEP) in quarter 4 of the 2022-23 school year. This table excludes students whose primary disability was Gifted but may include students whose secondary disability was Gifted. IEP and primary disability categories are based on SDP records. Advanced includes students who scored Advanced on either the PSSA or PASA; Proficient includes students who scored Proficient on the PSSA or At Target on the PASA; Basic includes students who scored Basic on the PSSA or Approaching Target on the PASA; Below Basic includes students who scored Below Basic on the PSSA or Emerging on the PASA. Approximately 21% of students with an active IEP completed the PASA.

Source: Qlik PSSA & Keystones App, accessed 12-8-23; Qlik Report Library PSSA & Keystones, accessed 11-15-23; Qlik Report Library Student Characteristics, accessed 11-20-23

Conclusion

Overall, Proficient/Advanced rates on the PSSA/PASA tended to be lower for students with IEPs compared to the District overall. However, performance rates also varied by primary disability category and sometimes met or exceeded overall performance at the District.⁷

⁷ Additional information on SDP PSSA performance is available on our Open Data website: https://www.philasd.org/performance/programsservices/open-data/school-performance/#pssa_keystone