

October 4, 2017 – Test results – 2017 PSSA

Dear Parents,

The PA Department of Education has released the results for the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA). As in past years, our school performance scores are among the top 10 in the state (among 500 school districts), despite a record number of parents choosing to opt their children out of taking these exams. Opt-out rates do impact our scores.

Of the 14 tests given, West Chester saw increases in six of them, no relative change in three, and a slight decrease in five. All of our scores remain extremely high compared to state averages. For a list of all math, reading, and science scores, please see here: [2017 PSSA](#).

While some grade levels saw a slight drop in the number of students scoring proficient or advanced, many grade levels saw an increase. For example, eighth grade reading scores in the state dropped from 58.4% to 56.9% from 2016 to 2017, while WCASD scores increased from 80.1% to 81.4%. Our grade five English Language Arts score went from 84.8% proficient or advanced in 2016 to 83.7% proficient or advanced in 2017. The state average for that same category went from 61.5% to 59.5% over the same period.

For the past two years our administrators and teachers have focused less on preparing for these tests, and instead on teaching our district-wide standards for each grade level and subject, measuring progress in the classroom, and trying to provide a more relaxed atmosphere as we head into these state-mandated tests. We are trying to dial back the stress and concentrate on learning in the same meaningful ways that our teachers do the rest of the year, when it's not time for everyone to stop for weeks to fill in bubbles.

In 2016, about 6% of our students in grades 3 - 8 opted out of taking these tests. In 2017, that number increased to more than 8%. This amounts to approximately 900 tests that were not counted toward the building score. Of the 900 students who opted out of test taking, and had a test score from the previous year, approximately 90% were proficient or advanced. Some of our brightest learners are choosing not to take these tests.

Many of you have been contacting your legislators and asking for testing reform. Your voices are being heard. The 2018 PSSA schedule includes a 20% reduction in testing time for our students in grades three through eight. This is a long overdue change, and is a good start to helping us get back to more instruction in the classroom, with less emphasis on a one-size-fits-all testing environment. It is still not enough, and we will continue to lobby for more change. If colleges and universities can accept a 3 hour test (SAT), why must we stop for weeks to test our elementary and middle school children annually?

We have extremely high standards, a challenging curriculum, innovative and dynamic programs, and excellent teachers. We will continue to challenge each student to achieve his or her personal best. We ask that our students continue to try to do their best on these tests, but please don't stress. We know our children are receiving an excellent education.

Sincerely,

Dr. Jim Scanlon
Superintendent of Schools
West Chester Area School District