

STANDARDS ALIGNED SYSTEM (SAS) IN PENNSYLVANIA

www.pde.state.pa.us/sas

Definition:

The Pennsylvania Standards Aligned System (SAS) is a collaborative product of research and good practice that identifies six distinct elements which, if utilized together, will provide schools and districts a common framework for continuous school and district enhancement and improvement. Much research has been conducted as to what makes a great school. There are many intangible components; however, research supports the notion that great schools and school systems tend to have six common elements that ensure Student Achievement: Clear Standards, Fair Assessments, Curriculum Framework, Instruction, Materials & Resources, and Interventions.



Clear Standards

Pennsylvania *standards* describe what students should know and be able to do and reflect the increasing complexity and sophistication that students are expected to achieve as they progress through school. The *assessment anchors* clarify the *standards* assessed on the Pennsylvania System of School

Assessment (PSSA) and can be used by educators to help prepare students for the PSSA. We use the metaphor of an *anchor* because we want to signal that the *assessment anchors* anchor both the state assessment system and the curriculum/instructional practices in schools.

Fair Assessments

Summative Assessment: Seeks to make an overall judgment of progress made at the end of a defined period of instruction. They occur at the end of a school level, grade, or course, or are administered at certain grades for purposes of state or local accountability. Considered high-stakes assessments and the results are often used in conjunction with No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). They are designed to produce clear data on the student's accomplishments at key points in his or her academic career.

Formative Assessment: Used by teachers and students during instruction to provide feedback to adjust ongoing teaching and learning to improve students' achievement of intended instructional outcomes.

Diagnostic Assessment: Ascertain, prior to instruction, each student's strengths, weaknesses, knowledge, and skills. Establishing these permits the instructor to remediate students and adjust the curriculum to meet pupils' unique needs.

Benchmark Assessment: Designed to provide feedback to both the teacher and the student about how the student is progressing towards demonstrating proficiency on grade level *standards*. Well-designed benchmark assessments and standards-based assessments measure the degree to which a student has mastered a given concept; measure concepts, skills, and/or applications; reported by referencing the *standards*, not other students' performance; serve as a test to which teachers want to teach; and measure performance regularly, not only at a single moment in time.

Curriculum Framework

A curriculum framework specifies what topics are to be taught at which grade levels for each subject in the curriculum. At any given grade level, topics that are taught are those-and only those-that are needed to provide the foundation for what

comes next. In Pennsylvania, we are developing curricular frameworks that are built by identifying *standards, anchors, big ideas, concepts, competencies, essential questions, academic vocabulary, and exemplars*.

Curriculum Framework Defined:

- **Big Ideas:** Declarative statements that describe concepts that transcend grade levels. *Big ideas* are essential to provide focus on specific content for all students.
- **Concepts:** Describe what students should know, key knowledge, as a result of this instruction, specific to grade level.
- **Competencies:** Describe what students should be able to do, key skills, as a result of this instruction, specific to grade level.
- **Essential Questions:** Questions connected to the SAS framework and are specifically linked to the *big ideas*. They should frame student inquiry and promote critical thinking. They should assist in learning transfer.
- **Vocabulary:** Key terminology linked to the *standards, big ideas, concepts* and competencies in a specific content area and grade level.
- **Exemplars:** Performance tasks that can be used for assessment and instruction as well as professional development. Exemplars provide educators with a concrete example of assessing students' understanding of the *big ideas, concepts* and competencies.

Instruction

Aligned instruction comprises the following activities:

- Teaching topics aligned with the standards.
- Ensuring the right level of challenge. Instruction that is too challenging leads to frustration and discouragement on the part of students. Instruction that is not challenging enough results in little or no learning.
- Focusing teaching based on the learning needs of each student. These needs are those identified through evaluation of student achievement against the standards.
- Implementing instructional strategies that 'scaffold' by building on each other to help students achieve the standards.

Materials and Resources

- The Voluntary Model Curriculum (VMC) will be strictly aligned to the Pennsylvania standards, concepts, and competencies as well as the *assessment anchors* for the four major content areas (mathematics, science, social studies, reading-writing-speaking-listening).
- The VMC will include learning progressions, units, and lesson plans.
- The learning progressions will span grades K-12, including what all students should know and be able to do as a result of successfully moving through grades K-8 and by taking specific courses in grades 9-12.
- The 9-12 courses are Algebra I, Algebra II, Geometry, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, World History (1450 - present), US History (1890 - present), Civics and Government, English Composition and English Literature (foundation works of American and World Literature).

Interventions

The purpose of interventions is to ensure students are provided with supports they need to meet and or exceed grade level *standards* as quickly as possible. The foremost safety net is to ensure that students attend school and are ready to learn. Decisions regarding student entry to and exit from safety

net programs should always be made on the basis of data. What we know from data indicates that early intervention is essential; safety nets are those built into the structure of regular classroom. A comprehensive system of safety nets involves a graduated set of interventions.

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More information on the Standards Aligned System can be found on the Education Hub on the PDE website at: www.pde.state.pa.us



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