

PSEA members should make careful decisions when preparing for and administering [Pennsylvania System of School Assessment](#) (“PSSA”) tests each year. Willful violation of the PSSA security and administration procedures could cost you your job and your professional certification.

An employee or administrator who willfully divulges PSSA test questions, falsifies student scores, or compromises the integrity, validity or reliability of the PSSA (such as coaching, prompting, providing answers to, or correcting answers of, students) can be subject to discipline administered by the employing school district that will affect employment. A professional employee can also be subject to discipline administered by the Professional Standards and Practices Commission that will affect certification. School district superintendents are required to investigate any report of alleged student impropriety or educator misconduct. The superintendent must file a report with the Pennsylvania Department of Education (“PDE”) Division of Assessment.

PDE provides security procedure guidelines for administration of the PSSA. School districts are expected to train school district personnel in PSSA security and administration procedures. Training is also provided through PATTAN. You should become familiar with policies and procedures of your school district, and with the PDE produced The Do’s and Don’ts of Test Security and/or Frequently Asked Questions on PSSA Test Security Procedure as well as other materials related to administration of the PSSA test available on the PDE website.

PSEA has prepared the following guidelines to assist members determine their professional and ethical responsibilities and obligations related to alleged violations of PSSA test procedures.

Do I have a duty to report suspected violations of PSSA test procedures?

PDE PSSA Test Security Procedures states that if “a teacher, parent, assessment administrator, or school administrator suspects a breach in test security, he or she should report the alleged incident in writing to the district’s superintendent or contact PDE’s Division of Assessment.” PDE may assert that an educator has a duty to report suspected violations. However, any such duty would only arise where an educator has actual, personal knowledge of a violation. That is, knowledge that an educator has from his/her own personal observation of the alleged conduct, at the time the conduct occurred, and not suspicions based on gossip, rumor, innuendo, or hearsay.

The high stakes assigned by federal and state legislators and bureaucrats to scores for standard assessments like the PSSA has led many school district and individual building administrators to create a climate of competitiveness among professional educators. The result too often has been an artificial atmosphere leading to unsubstantiated reports based on suspicion, distrust and fear.

What if I am directed to violate PSSA security or administration procedures?

You are responsible for your conduct as a professional educator administering the PSSA. If you are directed to engage in conduct you believe is a breach of PSSA test security or administration procedures, you should raise your concern, and request that the directive be put in writing. You should not refuse a directive from an administrator. If you are a member of PSEA, you should contact your local association representative as soon as possible. The local representative, PSEA UniServ Representative, or PSEA attorney will help you prepare a written report of the incident.

What if I suspect a colleague violated PSSA security or administration procedures?

PSEA has found in many cases that conduct by a colleague an educator suspected was a breach in test security or administration procedures in fact did not occur, was different than originally suspected, was an appropriate accommodation, was allowable by Test Administration Security guidelines (such as words of encouragement, answers related to directions, and pointing out items left blank), or otherwise was not a breach of PSSA procedures. If a member of PSEA has a good faith suspicion, based on personal knowledge and observation, that a colleague has violated PSSA procedures, the member should call PSEA Legal Division at 800.944.7732 and ask to speak to an attorney assigned to assist members who suspect PSSA test violations.

The attorney will help you determine whether you have an obligation to report. If it is necessary to report suspected misconduct by a professional colleague, a written report should be submitted to the superintendent. Your report must solely be based on, and only include, factual allegations of conduct that you personally observed. Your report must not be based on, or include, any gossip, rumor, innuendo or hearsay. Reports that are unfounded, incorrect, false, or made with malice will seriously, even irreparably, affect professional relations among colleagues, and may result in discipline to you that affects employment or certification.

What if a student informs me of an alleged violation of PSSA procedures?

Students are directed to report suspected violations to a teacher or administrator. You have an obligation to report when a student reports to you alleged impropriety or misconduct. You should direct the student to submit his/her allegation to the superintendent in writing. You should report to the superintendent that the student reported an alleged incident. Your report to the superintendent, however, should only indicate factually that the student made a report to you. You should not conduct an investigation, include in your report any allegations of conduct, or insert in the report your personal opinion or perception. It is the student's report, not your report!

What if another employee informs me of an alleged violation of PSSA procedures?

Unless you are a test administrator, you have no duty to report another employee's allegations. The employee is responsible to submit his/her own report. If the employee is a member of PSEA, you should suggest that he/she contact the PSEA Legal Division for assistance. You should not conduct an investigation, or discuss the allegation with others.

What if I am directed to attend an investigation of alleged violation of PSSA procedures?

If you are the educator accused of an alleged violation, you should assert your right to have an association representative present, and immediately contact your local association representative.

If there is an official investigation, and you are not the educator accused of an alleged violation, you may not knowingly or intentionally withhold from the proper authorities personal knowledge about violations of legal obligations. Personal knowledge is that knowledge you have from your own personal observation, and not suspicions based on gossip, rumor, innuendo or hearsay. You should contact your local association representative for assistance.

What are teachers allowed to do and not allowed to do?

PSEA has concluded that PDE needs to revise publications to clarify which acts are prohibited and why they are prohibited. Currently, the available list of what teachers may and may not do is set forth in The Do's and Don'ts of Test Security and the various accommodations guidelines. Until PDE provides clear and understandable guidelines, and school districts provide comprehensive training, educators are advised to follow existing policies/rules (if any), and their professional and common sense in administering tests.

The Do's and Don'ts of Test Security

(As published on the PDE website March 2009)

The following important procedural Do's and Don'ts for PSSA test administrators contain guidelines which must be followed to ensure that the integrity of the test remains above reproach.

Do . . .

- Make students feel comfortable and relaxed.
- Continually move around the testing site so as to ensure the students are adhering to the instructions given.
- Escort all students and carry all secure testing materials to alternate testing sites for extended time, etc.
- Collect all scratch paper or rough drafts for prompts and return them to the test coordinator to be destroyed.
- Attend the district's annual orientation for the administration of the test in order to be properly informed of the procedures to follow. This includes understanding test security and the confidential and proprietary nature of the documents.

Do Not . . .

- Discuss, disseminate, or otherwise reveal the contents of the test to anyone.
- Keep, copy, reproduce, or use any test, test item, any specific test content/prompt, or examinee responses to any item or any section of a secured test in any manner inconsistent with the instructions provided by and through the Pennsylvania Department of Education.
- Leave students unattended with testing materials or allow any student to leave the testing site for any reason with test materials.
- Possess any secure test materials at any time other than during the actual administration of the test. The administrators will be given their secure materials the morning of the administration of the test, and the materials must be counted and collected at the end of the test.
- Coach or provide feedback in any way, which includes answering any questions relating to the contents of the test, before, during, or after the test.
- Alter, influence, or interfere with a test response in any way or instruct the student to do so.
- Define or clarify a word.
- Read any portion of the Reading assessment.
- Read the stimulus passages and multiple choice items in the Writing assessment.
- Return any test booklet to any student after it has been turned in to the test administrator except in the following cases:
 - Make up sessions for absences.
 - Students who go to another testing site for extended time (Note: If, after the student returns the test booklet, it is noticed that not all of the test items were answered, the booklet cannot be returned to the student to complete.)