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### State College

With the State College Area school board asking the Pennsylvania Education Department for a replacement for the current assessment system, other area school district officials say they share concerns about the standardized tests.

The State College Area school board unanimously approved a resolution Monday to ask the PDE to pursue a federal [Innovative Assessment Demonstration Authority](#) grant that would allow the district to replace PSSA exams.

The annual standards-based, criterion-referenced testing requires students in grades 3-8 to sit for several hours on multiple days each spring and causes a "significant disruption," Vernon Bock, SCASD's assistant superintendent of elementary education, wrote in [the resolution](#).

The test's format does not allow for nuanced information about students' needs or development and occurs before a "significant" amount of the year's curriculum may be covered, Bock wrote.

"With results arriving after the end of the school year, the PSSA does not provide timely information to teachers and principals that could be used to improve learning experiences in ways that are responsive to students," Bock wrote. "... The Commonwealth spends nearly \$60 million a year in the implementation of an assessment model that produces little useful and timely information to parents or teachers."

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The district hopes to implement shorter assessments at the beginning, middle and end of school years with a "computer-adaptive, formative assessment" model, Bock wrote.

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Spring Creek Elementary School on Sept. 25, 2019. Abby Drey adrey@centredaily.com

The plan is to reduce the amount of time that students sit for exams, adjust the complexity of tasks for each student and provide timely and specific information to teachers about student growth and achievement, Bock wrote.

“The next step would be trying to get some time with local legislators and the state Department of Education to really pitch our idea,” Bock said Friday. “... (We want) to look at an alternative form of assessment tool that’s respectful of where students come in and where students leave us at the end of the year.”

PDE spokesman Rick Levis declined to comment Friday on the resolution. The department has not yet had time to review the resolution, he wrote.

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Neither Bellefonte nor Bald Eagle Area school districts have crafted a resolution similar to SCASD’s, but BASD Superintendent Michelle Saylor said its something the district may consider in the future.

“We too believe there is a much better way to assess our students than what is currently in place,” Saylor wrote in an email Wednesday.

The “high stakes” test is stressful for many students, even though the results have little to no bearing on them individually, Assistant Penns Valley Area School District Superintendent Sherri Connell said.



Centre Hall-Potter Elementary School on July 26, 2017. Phoebe Sheehan psheehan@centredaily.com

Results are tied to the school and the evaluations of its teachers, Connell said. Those influential outcomes can depend on a school's participation rate.

The PDE allows families to [opt out of the PSSA exams](#) as long as they notify school administrators, but schools are required to have a 95% participation rate, both in overall participation and each of the historically underperforming subgroups.

Students are counted as below basic — the lowest range — if the school has a lower participation rate, Connell said.

The amount of Philipsburg-Osceola Area School District students opting out has increased over the past five years, district administrative specialist Linda Hockey wrote in an email Thursday.

Thirty-four P-O Middle School students, 36 BASD students and about 10 BEA students opted out of last year's testing.

Information gleaned from PSSA testing is one piece of data PVASD uses to refine its curriculum, but local assessments are more effective, give teachers more useful information to drive instruction and are less stressful, Connell said.

"PSSAs are more of a, 'Hey, here you are,' rather than helping students understand," Connell said. "We're spending huge amounts of time on testing and I don't know if we're getting the best bang for our buck."