

# Students still lag in state tests

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## ABSTRACT (ABSTRACT)

"There's still a sizable gap where Philadelphia schools are and where they should be," he said. "The largest concern for us is closing that gap. I consider these results to be a starting point for school reform in Philadelphia and am confident that the reforms we are now putting in place will lead to improved student performance across the board." "More time on task will make a difference," [Paul Vallas] said. "These things are going to help us boost students achievement this year." "We're not trying to over-test," he said. "We need to use the test as the diagnostic tool. We need to establish baseline data."

## FULL TEXT

Many schools within the district have slightly increased their 2002 Pennsylvania System of School Assessment test scores. But overall, CEO Paul Vallas said, students are still below state level.

"There's still a sizable gap where Philadelphia schools are and where they should be," he said. "The largest concern for us is closing that gap. I consider these results to be a starting point for school reform in Philadelphia and am confident that the reforms we are now putting in place will lead to improved student performance across the board." Meanwhile, students between grades three and eight who test below average will attend mandatory extended-day programs, which will be launched next week. And students who neglect these programs will be sent to mandatory summer school.

Additionally, the quality review process performed by the Accountability Office is expected to give the district more of an idea of what is and isn't working in each school. Then they will have a better idea of what improvements need to be made.

"More time on task will make a difference," Vallas said. "These things are going to help us boost students achievement this year."

Fifth grade students within the district averaged 1150 on reading scores. Vallas said that's about 10 points higher than last year. However, math scores remained the same.

Eighth grade reading scores averaged about 1140 - ten points higher than last year. And math averages were 1170 - a 20 point increase.

Eleventh grade students scored an average of 1180 in math and 1170 in reading - a 10-point decrease.

For the most part, the older the kids got, the poorer they performed, Vallas said.

"There certainly is a lot of catching up to do," he said. "We're going to do our best to see improvement next year." The PSSA exams were taken last spring.

Students will also be taking the Terra Nova exams Monday. This test is being used, Vallas said, because it's more widely used and more closely aligned to the state's standards.

"We're not trying to over-test," he said. "We need to use the test as the diagnostic tool. We need to establish baseline data."

Commissioner Daniel Whelan said parents need to make sure students get a good night's rest and eat a good breakfast before the exams begin next week.

Mandatory retention grades will be third and eighth. However, Vallas said, students performing poorly between those grades can also be held back to repeat a grade.

School Reform Commission Chairman Jim E. Nevels said the district is committed to making sure students get the tools they need to improve their scores. "Philadelphia students must be given the fundamentals they need in order to demonstrate competent in reading and math, and we are aggressively addressing this issue to ensure improvement," Nevels said.

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