

BACKGROUND/OVERVIEW

What is Firefly?

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) is introducing Firefly, a fully online, computer-adaptive benchmark assessment designed to be administered as a single-session test using the same platform as the summative assessments. PA Firefly will be available for English Language Arts (ELA) grades 3-8, mathematics grades 3-8, Keystone Algebra I, and Keystone Literature during the 2024-2025 pilot. This high-quality benchmark assessment tool is available to schools for supporting student learning throughout the year. Firefly is aligned to Pennsylvania standards to reflect and measure the same student knowledge and skills measured by the summative end-of-year Pennsylvania System of State Assessment (PSSA) and end-of-course Keystone Exams assessments.

How much does Firefly cost?

There is no cost to schools. Firefly is offered as a free resource by the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

Does PDE require Local Education Agencies to use Firefly?

No. Firefly is an optional, state-funded benchmark assessment provided by PDE to Pennsylvania schools and districts.

Why should districts/schools use Firefly?

Firefly is designed to complete Pennsylvania's innovative assessment system by adding benchmark testing to the diagnostic and summative assessments already provided. As a custom benchmark assessment built for Pennsylvania classrooms, Firefly:

- Is designed specifically and solely for Pennsylvania use, and aligned to Pennsylvania standards
- Measures the same student knowledge and skills as the PSSA and Keystone Exams



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- Supports student learning throughout the year and provides feedback relative to grade level expectations, helping teachers and students prepare effectively for the summative assessments
- Is the ONLY state-funded, state-approved benchmark assessment that provides predictions of student performance on the end-of-year/end-of-course summative assessments
- Will be fully integrated with summative-assessment reporting for the PSSA and Keystone Exams

How will Firefly help students, teachers, and leaders?

Students benefit the most when teachers can assess their strengths and areas of need. Firefly offers real time results to help students attain educational goals on the end of year/end of course summative assessments. It allows school leaders the opportunity to support educators and direct resources to where they are needed the most.

What questions does Firefly help answer?

Firefly helps Pennsylvania educators answer questions such as:

- How are my students likely to perform on the summative assessments at the end of the year?
- Are my students on track to meet the end-of-year grade-level goals?
- Are my students meeting the expected grade-level benchmarks?

When will Firefly be available?

During the 2024–2025 school year, Firefly will be available as a pilot from November 18, 2024, through April 18, 2025. In future years, Firefly will be available from early fall to spring. PDE encourages as many schools as possible to participate in this initial field test year so that Firefly represents all Pennsylvania students.

Some features of Firefly won't be available during the initial field test year. See the Firefly Features Timeline for more information.

When is the deadline for Local Education Agencies to enroll in the pilot?

Local Education Agencies (LEAs) can begin enrolling students in the Firefly pilot administration when Test Setup begins on November 4, 2024 or at any



time during the test window. Uploading student data and creating test sessions in the DRC INSIGHT Portal is all that is necessary for LEAs to participate in the pilot administration.

TEST CONTENT AND STANDARDS ALIGNMENT

What grades and subjects are included?

Firefly assesses the same grades and content areas as the PSSA and Keystone Exams. During the initial pilot year (2024–2025), this includes English language arts (reading only) and mathematics for grades 3–8, and Keystone Algebra 1 and Keystone Literature. Writing (Conventions of Standard English) will be added to the ELA assessment in 2025–2026. Science for grades 5 and 8 and Biology will also be available starting in 2025–2026.

What does Firefly measure?

Firefly is fully aligned to Pennsylvania standards and is designed to measure student progress toward end-of-year grade-level learning goals and expectations. These benchmark assessments reflect and measure the same student knowledge and skills that are measured by the summative end-of-year (PSSA) and end-of-course (Keystone Exams) assessments.

What types of items are included in Firefly?

The online Firefly assessments include technology-enhanced, evidence-based selected response, and multiple-choice items. All items are automatically scored (no hand scoring is required).

Can you elaborate on the types of technology-enhanced items (TEIs)?

There will be a range of TEIs on both the ELA and mathematics tests, often—in mathematics especially—dependent on the standards and eligible content for a specific grade level.

On the ELA test, students may be asked, among other interactions, to:

- highlight phrases from a passage excerpt;
- select options from drop-down menus;
- drag text or punctuation into tables, boxes, or sentences;
- enter check marks into interactive tables; and



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- sequence items to show the correct order of a series of events or complete a summary.

On the mathematics test, students may be asked, among other interactions, to:

- place and move hands on a clock;
- measure lengths using an inches or centimeters ruler;
- place data points on a line plot;
- draw angles;
- draw lines of symmetry;
- drag numbers or symbols from an option “bank” into incomplete equations or expressions;
- draw lines between options in separate columns to show connections along a given construct;
- place points on a number line or coordinate grid;
- graph lines on a coordinate plane;
- graph the solution set for an inequality on a number line;
- shade the solution region for a system of inequalities on a coordinate plane;
- shade portions of given shapes to illustrate fractions;
- manipulate the height of the bars in a bar graph to reflect given data; and
- place checkmarks in tables or next to listed elements.

Grade-specific online testing tools will be provided for each TEI type that a student may see at their grade-level.

Are open-ended mathematics and ELA questions part of the Firefly assessments? If not, how will Firefly account for this when making predictions?

There are no (TDAs) or open-ended questions on the Firefly assessment for mathematics, or grade 3 ELA and Keystone Literature. Constructed response are used for grade 3 ELA and Keystone Literature. The lack of TDAs will help keep test-taking to a manageable timeframe and avoids the time and cost of hand-scoring. The effect on the test’s predictive ability will depend on how the results from the first year of Firefly match up with 2025 PSSA/Keystone results. The first year of the Firefly results will be compared to student performance on the 2025 PSSA and Keystone Exams. A predictive model will



then be finalized that accounts for the lack of TDAs in Firefly. Please note that predictions will not be provided from the pilot year, 2024-2025.

Is the test available in Spanish or any language other than English?

The Firefly assessments will be available only in English for the pilot administration.

ADMINISTRATION TIMELINE

When during the school year should Firefly be administered?

Testing is available throughout the year, beginning in the fall and closing with the spring summative assessments. These seasonal test administration windows will allow for more meaningful score interpretation relative to milestones throughout the school year.

During the pilot year (2024–2025), the Firefly test window will be open from November 18, 2024, through April 18, 2025. In future years, Firefly will be available from early fall to spring.

When to administer Firefly within the test window is a decision for each LEA. PDE is developing some suggested assessment schedules that may help to inform LEA decisions.

How many times can Firefly be administered each year?

Students can take each Firefly assessment up to three times during the pilot window. Taking the assessment multiple times will help measure progress toward end-of-year/end of course learning goals. When to administer Firefly within the test window is a decision for the LEA.

TEST FORMAT

Is the test delivered online?

Yes. Firefly is a fully online, computer-adaptive assessment designed to be administered as single-session tests on the same DRC INSIGHT platform as Pennsylvania's Classroom Diagnostic Tools (CDT), PSSA, and Keystone Exam assessments. Because Firefly uses the same test administration systems



already in place for the other assessments, moving from interim/benchmark testing to the summative test is seamless.

What is a computer-adaptive test (CAT)?

When taking a CAT, the difficulty of each question is based on how a student answers previous questions. As the student answers correctly, questions become more difficult. If the student answers incorrectly, the questions become easier. Because the CAT adjusts to each student's performance, the Firefly can provide more information about students than a fixed set of questions given to all students.

How does the computer-adaptive nature of Firefly compare to the CDT?

Both the CDT and Firefly are computer-adaptive tests, and the same item selection routine (in DRC INSIGHT) is used. The main differences in the CAT configurations are the blueprint and whether off-grade items can be assigned.

- CDT administers an approximately equal number of questions per diagnostic category, while Firefly administers a number of questions to approximately match the summative blueprints.
- CDT allows administration of off-grade questions to facilitate diagnoses, while Firefly focuses on on-grade level questions to measure on-grade expectations.

Should Firefly be used with students well below grade level?

Firefly measures progress toward end-of-year goals by administering on-grade questions. It will not administer off-grade questions no matter how many on-grade questions are answered incorrectly. However, CDT allows for administration of off-grade questions to facilitate diagnoses.

If it is known that a student is significantly below grade level, they should use the CDT. The use of the CDT will help in understanding where the student is today. It gives a detailed, short-range view of student performance at a diagnostic category level to determine where to focus instruction to meet your day-to-day classroom learning goals.



How long does the test take?

It is anticipated each content-area test session will take about one class period for students to complete (approximately 40 items per test session).

DATA AND REPORTS

Do Firefly reports include predictions of student success on the summative assessments?

Yes. Beginning in the 2025–2026 school year, Firefly will estimate student performance on the PSSA and Keystone Exams. This will give teachers valuable insight into how their students are progressing toward end-of-year goals, and what areas may need additional focus during classroom instruction.

What reports are provided?

Firefly reports are available online in the same Interactive Reporting (IR) system that is used for the PSSA and Keystone Exams and reflect the same reporting categories as the PSSA and Keystone. Firefly reports include the following:

- Individual Student Reports (ISRs)
 - Starting in 2025–2026, summative-assessment predictions will be provided on the Firefly ISRs. Likewise, Firefly scores will be reported on the summative ISRs.
- District/school roster reports
- Teacher-level reports (available starting in 2025–2026)

Will schools participating in the pilot receive student performance data?

Yes. During the initial pilot year, schools will receive individual student reports (ISRs) containing student performance data. District/school roster reports will also be provided during the pilot.

How quickly are student results available?

Firefly provides test results within hours of assessment completion, as the items are computer scored.



INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCES

Are instructional resources available to support teachers and students?

Yes. Instructional Strategies aligned to learning progressions will be available for teacher use starting with the 2025–2026 administration. The instructional strategies will be linked to student results and available in the Interactive Reporting system.

FIREFLY AND CDT

How is Firefly different from the CDT?

Pennsylvania's Classroom Diagnostic Tools (CDT) and the Firefly Student Progress Indicators are not interchangeable: each has its own uses and purposes, and each provides unique benefits for students and educators. The CDT is a true diagnostic assessment that helps determine where to focus instruction to meet day-to-day learning goals; Firefly is designed to be an interim assessment that supports end-of-year goals and provides a prediction as to how students will perform on the PSSA or Keystone assessments. For a complete comparison along with guidance on using the CDT and Firefly, see the document: [Firefly and CDT: How Are They Different? Link Firefly and CDT: How Are They Different](#)

Can Firefly and the CDT be used together?

Yes, PDE encourages schools to continue using CDT alongside the new Firefly assessments. When used together, the CDT and Firefly provide a comprehensive view of student learning to help teachers meet day-to-day goals as well as end-of-year targets. For more information, see the document: [Firefly and CDT: How Are They Different? Link Firefly and CDT: How Are They Different](#)



PDE is developing suggested assessment schedules that will include the CDT and Firefly.

TEST DELIVERY, TRAINING, AND SUPPORT

What is the test experience like for students and educators?

Firefly is delivered by DRC and uses the same systems and processes that you already have in place for the CDT, Keystone Exams, and PSSA:

- Same DRC INSIGHT test platform used for other Pennsylvania assessments—familiar system and tools for both students and educators
- Same DRC INSIGHT Portal for managing students/test sessions and accessing reports as other Pennsylvania assessments—familiar system for test coordinators

The Firefly test experience mirrors the summative assessments wherever possible:

- Single-session administration—test tickets lock overnight
- No public browser—proctored sessions only
- Calculators available per summative assessment policies

Can the test be saved so a student can exit and then go back and finish the test?

Yes.

What accommodations are available for students?

Firefly includes the same standard suite of online accommodations and tools that are provided for the summative assessments:

- Magnification, color choices, highlighting, cross-out, etc.
- Text to Speech (audio) for math and science tests

Is training provided for teachers and students?

Yes. Firefly-specific Online Tools Training (OTTs) and Student Tutorials will be provided.



How do schools/districts get started with Firefly?

Firefly uses the same systems and processes as the other Pennsylvania statewide assessments (CDT, PSSA, and Keystone Exams). Once you are ready to begin testing with Firefly, simply follow the same test-setup processes already in place for the Pennsylvania assessments. If you have questions, you can call customer service at 1-800-451-7849 or email PAcustomerservice@datarecognitioncorp.com.

Schools can use the QR code below for additional information:

