

The Keystone Exams regulation was published in the January 9 issue of the Pennsylvania Bulletin, and is now final and effective. <http://www.pabulletin.com/secure/data/vol40/40-2/56.html>

The following are some of the key components as summarized by the Pennsylvania School Board Association (PSBA):

Graduation Requirements -- Effective with the graduating class of 2014-15, requirements must include the following: 1) Course completion and grades; 2) Completion of a culminating project, which may include completion of a college application process; 3) Demonstration of proficiency as determined by the school district in each of the state academic standards not assessed by a state assessment; and 4) Demonstration of proficiency in literature (reading), English composition, math, science and social studies as determined through one or more of the following: use of state-developed Keystone Exams, local assessments and Advanced Placement/International Baccalaureate Exams. School boards will decide which exams they wish to use for graduation purposes.

State graduation requirements are phased in over time. The class of 2014-15 must demonstrate proficiency in English composition, literature, algebra I and biology. Beginning with the class of 2016-17 students must demonstrate proficiency in English composition and literature; two of three mathematics (algebra I, geometry, algebra II), one of two sciences (biology or chemistry), and one of three social studies (American history, civics and government or world history).

Using Keystone Exams for Graduation -- PDE will develop 10 Keystone Exams that districts may use for graduation purposes and administer as final end of course exams. Development of the 10 exams will be phased in as follows:

- For school year 2010-11: Algebra I, literature and biology.
- For fall 2011: English composition and algebra II.
- For fall 2012: Geometry and U.S. history.
- For fall 2016: Chemistry, civics & government, and world history.

Keystone Exams will count for one-third of the final course grade. Appropriate accommodations will be provided for students with disabilities, English language learners and students identified as gifted.

Beginning in the 2011-12 school year, a student who does not pass one or more of the Keystone Exams or validated local assessments must be offered supplemental instructional support. Students who score below proficient must be provided opportunities to retake the test or modules of the test. Students who score below basic, which indicates extremely limited knowledge or skills in the content tested, would not receive any points towards their final grade. However, students who score below the proficient level would be able to supplement their Keystone Exam score by successfully completing one or more project-based assessments. Points earned through the project would be added to their highest Keystone Exam score. Projects would be administered at the local level and scored at a regional level by panels composed of teachers, principals and curriculum specialists.

Using Local Assessments for Graduation -- Local assessments used for graduation purposes must be independently validated once every six years in conjunction with submission of the school districts strategic plan. The local assessments may be designed to include a variety of assessment strategies and may include use of one or more Keystone Exams.

PDE will create a Local Assessment Validation Committee that will develop the criteria for the local validation process and criteria for selection of approved validation entities. PSBA is appointing four members to this committee.

The cost to validate local assessments will be evenly divided between the school district and PDE and will be subject to appropriations provided by law. If PDE cannot provide sufficient funding to cover its share, local assessments submitted for validation will be deemed to be valid for the balance of the strategic plan period until either a new or mid-point update to the strategic plan is due to the department.

Replacing the 11th Grade PSSA -- The PDE will seek permission from the U.S. Department of Education to have the Keystone Exam system approved to replace the 11th grade PSSAs as the high school level single accountability system under the No Child Left Behind Act. If approved, the current 11th grade math and reading PSSA Exams would be replaced by algebra I and literature Keystone Exams, which would be used to determine AYP. The biology Keystone Exam will be used as the high school level science assessment required by NCLB, although these scores are not used to determine AYP. Only these three Keystone Exams would become mandatory and they would be counted for AYP purposes only unless the district chooses to use these scores for graduation purposes as well. The Keystone Exams will be administered as end-of-course tests at the grade level in which the student completes the course.

PDE Assistance -- The department will provide, for voluntary use, model curriculum, diagnostic assessments and related instructional resources aligned with state academic standards in each of the courses and content areas assessed by the Keystone Exams. The department will also provide assistance in the development of effective student tutoring, remediation and extended instructional time programs. Upon request, PDE will provide technical guidance to school districts in developing local assessments that meet the criteria for validation.

Participation of Stakeholders -- The new regulation provides for the participation of stakeholders in these ways:

Local Assessment Validation Advisory Committee -- PDE will create an advisory committee to develop the criteria for the local validation process and criteria for selection of approved validation entities. The committee is composed of up to two representatives each from the department and State Board and four representatives from the Pennsylvania School Boards Association. The committee must appoint up to four additional members who are jointly selected by the committee. The department, in consultation with the committee, will establish a list of entities approved to perform independent validations of local assessments. The committee must submit its recommendations for approval or disapproval by the State Board. The department will post the approved criteria, selection criteria and list of approved entities on its Web site.

Performance Level Advisory Committee -- An advisory committee will be established by PDE to assist in developing Keystone Exam performance level descriptors and performance level cut scores. The committee includes teachers, principals, school board members, school administrators, higher education officials, representatives of the U.S. Armed Forces, employers and others with no less than one-half its members selected from nominations made by statewide teachers unions and other education stakeholder organizations.

State Assessment Validation Advisory Committee -- A committee will be established by PDE to advise it on its plans to conduct a validity study of the Keystone Exams and review and provide feedback on study findings. The committee is composed of up to two representatives each from the department, State Board, PSEA and AFT-PA. Up to four additional members will be selected who are jointly selected by the committee. The department and this committee will investigate the use of a certificate based on industry approved standards and performance on a NOCTI as an alternative pathway to graduation and make a report and recommendation to the State Board of Education by next January.