

Pennsylvania Keystone Exams

Information for Parents or Guardians

What are the Keystone Exams?

The Keystone Exams are end-of-course assessments designed to evaluate proficiency in academic content. Beginning with the class of 2017, students must demonstrate proficiency on the Algebra 1, Literature, and Biology Keystone Exams to graduate. Students will be offered multiple opportunities to take the Keystones throughout their high school careers.

Who will participate in the Keystone Exams?

Beginning in 2012-2013 the Algebra I, Literature, and Biology Keystone Exams will replace the 11th grade Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) tests in mathematics, reading, and science for purposes of satisfying *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB)/*Adequate Yearly Progress* (AYP) requirements. Therefore, all students in grade 11 must participate in the Algebra I, Literature, and Biology Keystone Exams. Additionally, students in any grade who are enrolled in a Keystone related course should participate.

When will the exams be offered?

The Keystone Exams will be administered three times each year—winter, spring, and summer. Specific administration dates will be published by the Pennsylvania Department of Education on the SAS website at www.pdesas.org.

Who decided what Keystone Exams should measure?

Groups of educators from across Pennsylvania chose the areas of knowledge on which the Keystone Exams are based. The groups included teachers, supervisors, curriculum directors, and college specialists. These groups also reviewed, edited, and approved exam questions.

What is assessed on the Keystone Exams?

Pennsylvania adopted the Common Core Standards, standards aligned with expectations for success in college and the workplace. The Keystones are designed to measure these standards.

How long is a Keystone Exam administration?

There is no time limit for a student to complete a Keystone Exam. Each Keystone Exam should take the typical student 2 to 3 hours to complete. There are two modules on each test, and each module (or Test Session) of the Keystone Exam should take 1 to 1.5 hours to complete. Districts may select to administer the entire Keystone Exam at once or do each module on separate, consecutive days.

What are the available formats for administering the Keystone Exams?

The Keystone Exams are available in both online and paper/pencil formats. Districts will determine if online, paper/pencil, or both formats will be used locally. Makeup exams will also be administered in either online or paper/pencil format.

What types of questions are on the Keystone Exams?

The Keystone Exams will include multiple-choice questions and constructed-response, or open-ended, questions. For each Keystone Exam, approximately 60% to 75% of the total score will be from multiple-choice questions and 25% to 40% of the total score will be from constructed-response questions. The English Composition Keystone Exam will be an exception, with 20% of the total score from multiple-choice questions and 80% of the total score from constructed-response questions.

How are the written responses to constructed-response questions scored?

The written responses for constructed-response questions are scored by evaluators trained in applying a pre-determined scoring system. Scores are based on content only. Except for English Composition, spelling and punctuation are not included as part of the scoring process. Most constructed-response questions require students to show their work or explain their reasoning. These Keystone Exam questions will ask students to explain, analyze, describe, or compare. Some questions will also require students to perform calculations or create graphs, plots, or drawings.

How are the results reported?

Keystone Exam scores will be processed as quickly as possible and provided to the districts. Two copies of the individual student report for all Keystone Exams will be sent to the school districts and charter schools. One copy should be sent home to parents/guardians; the other is kept by the school/district. School-level reports will be used for curricular and planning purposes. School districts and charter schools may publish the results of Keystone Exams for each school. The state will also release school-by-school exam data.

May parents see the Keystone Exams?

Parents and guardians may review the Keystone Exams if they believe they may be in conflict with their religious beliefs by making arrangements with the School Test Coordinator once the exams arrive at the school.

Confidentiality agreements must be signed, and no copies of the Keystone Exams or notes about exam questions will be permitted to leave the school.

The deadline for reviewing the Keystone Exam(s) is Friday, May 10th.

If, after reviewing the Keystone Exams, parents or guardians do not want their child to participate in one or all of the exams due to a conflict with their religious beliefs, they may write to the school district superintendent or charter school CAO prior to the beginning of the exam(s) to request to excuse their child from the exam(s).

Parental opt-out –

The regulation gives parents/guardians the right to review any state assessment two weeks prior to administration to determine whether the assessment conflicts with their religious beliefs. The school must have procedures in place to be followed when a request is made, and the procedures must be consistent with guidance provided by the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) in its assessment administration instructions. In asserting a religious objection to the assessment, a parent/guardian must explain the objection in their written request for excusal.

Project required for opt-out students –

Students who are not taking Keystone Exams under the parental opt-out provision must take the project-based assessment for each subject area required for graduation.

For additional information about the Keystone Exams, visit the SAS website at www.pdesas.org or contact your school district.

