

Statewide High School Graduation Requirement Guidance Act 158 of 2018

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**COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

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Introduction and Background

[Act 158 of 2018](#) (Act 158), which was signed into law by Governor Tom Wolf on October 24, 2018, shifts Pennsylvania's reliance on high stakes testing as a graduation requirement to provide alternatives for high school students to demonstrate readiness for postsecondary success. Formerly, Pennsylvania's statewide graduation requirement was more restrictive, requiring most students to pass the Keystone Exams — end of course exams in Algebra I, Literature, and Biology — in order to graduate. Act 158, in conjunction with Act 6 of 2017 (Act 6), expands the options for students to demonstrate postsecondary readiness through four additional pathways that more fully illustrate college, career, and community readiness.

The statewide graduation requirement outlined in Act 6 and Act 158 takes effect for the graduating class of 2022. While there is no statewide graduation requirement for the classes of 2019, 2020, and 2021, local policies also govern graduation. Local policies are not preempted by the current moratorium nor are they limited by the statewide requirement. School entities are encouraged to work with their solicitors to ensure that their high school graduation policies comply with Act 6 and Act 158, which amended section 121 of the Pennsylvania Public School Code, 24 P.S. § 1-121 and affected the implementation of Title 22, Chapter 4 of the Pennsylvania Code.

Keystone Exams will continue as the statewide assessment that Pennsylvania uses to comply with accountability requirements set forth in the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Although a student may not be required to achieve proficiency on the Keystone Exams in order to graduate, **students are required to take the Keystone Exams for purposes of federal accountability**. Failure to do so will affect a Local Education Agency (LEA) and school's participation rate.

Purpose

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide an overview of changes to the statewide graduation requirement as a result of the enactment of Act 158. Future Department of Education (PDE) guidance will provide more detail as to the implementation of Act 158, including the composite Keystone score, established cut scores for alternate assessments, and guidelines to define pathway evidence.

Requirements

For students graduating in 2022 and beyond, the following options exist to meet the statewide graduation requirement:

- **Keystone Proficiency Pathway:** Scoring proficient or advanced on each Keystone Exam - Algebra I, Literature, and Biology.

- **Keystone Composite Pathway:** Earning a satisfactory composite score on the Algebra I, Literature, and Biology Keystone Exams (while achieving at least a proficient score on at least one of the three exams and no less than a basic score on the remaining two).

No later than July 30, 2019, the Secretary shall recommend, and the State Board of Education shall approve, the satisfactory composite score.

- **Alternate Assessment Pathway:** Successful completion of locally established grade-based requirements for academic content areas associated with each Keystone Exam on which the student did not achieve proficiency **and** one of the following:
 - Attainment of an established score on an approved alternate assessment (SAT, PSAT, ACT, ASVAB);
 - Gold Level on the ACT WorkKeys Assessment;
 - Attainment of an established score on an Advanced Placement Program or an International Baccalaureate Diploma Program exam in an academic content area associated with each Keystone Exam on which the student did not achieve at least a proficient score;
 - Successful completion of a concurrent enrollment course in an academic content area associated with each Keystone Exam in which the student did not achieve at least a proficient score;
 - Successful completion of a pre-apprenticeship program; or
 - Acceptance in an accredited 4-year nonprofit institution of higher education and evidence of the ability to enroll in college-level coursework.
- **Evidence Based Pathway:** Successful completion of locally established grade-based requirements for academic content areas associated with each Keystone Exam on which the student did not achieve proficiency and demonstration of three pieces of evidence consistent with the student's goals and career plans, including
 - One of the following:
 - Attainment of an established score on the ACT WorkKeys assessment, a SAT subject test, an Advanced Placement Program Exam, or an International Baccalaureate Diploma Program Exam;
 - Acceptance to an accredited nonprofit institution of higher education other than a 4-year institution and evidence of the ability to enroll in college-level coursework;
 - Attainment of an [industry-recognized credential](#); or
 - Successful completion of a concurrent enrollment or postsecondary course; and
 - Two additional pieces of evidence, including one or more of the options listed above, or: satisfactory completion of a service learning project; attainment of a score of proficient or advanced on a Keystone Exam; a letter guaranteeing full-time employment; a certificate of successful completion of an internship or cooperative education program; or satisfactory compliance with the NCAA's core courses for college-bound student athletes with a minimum grade point average (GPA) of 2.0.
- **CTE Pathway:** For Career and Technical Education (CTE) Concentrators, successful completion of locally established grade-based requirements for academic content areas associated with each Keystone Exam on which the student did not achieve proficiency and attainment of an industry-based competency certification related to the CTE Concentrator's program of study or demonstration of a high likelihood of success on an

approved industry-based competency assessment or readiness for continued meaningful engagement in the CTE Concentrator's program of study.

For further explanation of the CTE Pathway, please see PDE's [Act 6 guidance](#).

A composite Keystone score will be released in August of 2019. Established cut scores for alternate assessments and guidelines to define pathway evidence will be released in the 2019-20 school year.

More information about the new statewide graduation requirement effective with the graduating class of 2022 is available on the [PDE website](#).

Definitions

ACT WorkKeys Assessment - An assessment of workplace skills administered by ACT.

Advanced Placement Program (AP) - A program authorized by the college board that allows a student to study college-level subjects while enrolled in high school and to receive advanced placement and college credit for earning a qualified score on the course-related Advanced Placement exam.

Approved Alternate Assessment - An SAT, PSAT, ACT or ASVAB.

- **ACT** - A standardized test for the assessment of college readiness administered by ACT.
- **Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB)** - The aptitude test developed and maintained by the United States Department of Defense.
- **SAT** - A standardized test for the assessment of college readiness administered by the College Board.

Approved Industry-Based Competency Assessment - A NOCTI exam, NIMS assessment or other industry-based competency assessment identified by the Secretary of Education.

- **NIMS Assessment** - An assessment based on the National Institute for Metalworking Skills standards.
- **NOCTI Exam** - A National Occupational Competency Testing Institute exam.

Concurrent Enrollment Course - A course in which a secondary student is enrolled and, upon successful completion of which both high school and postsecondary credit are earned.

Cooperative Education Program - A program of instruction whereby students alternate or coordinate their high school studies with a job in a field related to their academic or career objectives.

CTE Concentrator - A student who, by the end of a reporting year, will be reported as successfully completing at least 50 percent of the minimum technical instructional hours required under 22 Pa. Code Ch. 339 (relating to vocational education).

Established Score - A score recommended by the Secretary of Education and approved by the State Board of Education.

GPA - Grade point average.

International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Program - An academically challenging two-year precollege diploma program comprised of three core requirements and six academic subject areas with final examinations that prepare students 16 to 19 years of age for higher education and life in a global society.

Postsecondary Course - A course in which a secondary student is enrolled, and, upon successful completion, postsecondary credit is earned.

Pre-apprenticeship Program - An apprenticeship program registered with the Pennsylvania Apprenticeship and Training Council.

SAT Subject Test - A standardized test for the assessment of a specific content area administered by the College Board.

School Entity – A school district, intermediate unit, area vocational-technical school, charter school, cyber charter school, regional charter school or multiple charter school organization.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Are project-based assessments still an option to meet proficiency?

No school entity may be required to offer nor, may any student be required to participate in or complete a project-based assessment in order to meet statewide graduation requirements as provided for in 22 Pa. Code § 4.51c.

School entities may choose to incorporate project-based assessments into their local graduation requirements. To that end, project-based assessments will be made available on the PDE [Standards Aligned System](#) website as a resource for school entities. School administrators may download the projects and utilize them in the local setting, but PDE will not manage or score the project-based assessments.

For projects submitted for evaluation through March 2019 via the [Project Based Assessment](#) website, PDE will evaluate those projects. Projects completed after March 2019 are subject to evaluation at the local level.

2. Do the graduation requirements apply to students who opt out of a Keystone Exam?

Yes. Students who opt out of one or more Keystone Exams must still meet state and local graduation requirements. Students may meet the statewide graduation requirement through one of the multiple pathways described in the Requirements section above. Note that students opting out will affect the student participation rate related to a school's accountability status.

3. Is supplemental instruction required for those students who do not meet proficiency?

A school entity may offer supplemental instruction to a student who does not demonstrate proficiency on a Keystone Exam or on a locally validated assessment; however, no student is required to participate.

When offered, supplemental instruction must:

- Be consistent with the student's educational program.
- Assist the student to attain proficiency in the state academic standards.
- Ensure that students who accept the school entity's offer of supplemental instruction are able to participate in both supplemental instruction and instruction related to their career, military or postsecondary education plans.

When offered, supplemental instruction must not:

- Intrude into instructional time for career and technical education.
- Occur during a student's dedicated time in a career and technical education program.

4. May students who score proficient or advanced on a Keystone Exam retake the exam?

A student who achieves a score of proficient or advanced on a Keystone Exam shall only be permitted to retake the exam if the student or parent submits a request in writing to the school entity.

5. Does a waiver option exist?

A chief school administrator may grant a waiver of the requirements for demonstrations of proficiency on the Keystone Exams or alternative graduation requirements for a student in grade 12 or to accommodate a student who experiences extenuating circumstances (e.g., serious illness, death in the student's immediate family, family emergency, frequent school transfers, transfer from out-of-state in grade 12).

Each student granted a waiver under this subsection shall complete locally established, grade-based requirements for academic content areas associated with each Keystone Exam.

If the waivers granted by a chief school administrator exceed more than 5 percent of students in a graduating class, PDE will conduct a review of the waivers granted by the school entity. The school entity will be required to submit an improvement plan to PDE and will be subject to an audit conducted by PDE unless PDE determines that the 5 percent threshold was exceeded because waivers were granted to students who experienced extenuating circumstances.

6. What regulations exist for students with disabilities?

A student with a disability who satisfactorily completes a special education program developed by an individualized education program team under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and 22 Pa. Code Ch. 14 (relating to special education services and programs) that does not otherwise meet the requirements of this section shall be granted and issued a regular high school diploma by the student's school entity.

7. Are there requirements to include Keystone Exam proficiency levels on a student's transcript?

The performance level demonstrated in each of the state academic standards, including the highest performance level demonstrated by a student on the associated Keystone Exam, may be included on a student's transcript as determined by each school entity.

8. What requirements exist for student transfers from out-of-state?

If a student transfers into a Pennsylvania high school from out of state, a private school, a home school environment, or from out of country, and that student's transcript shows credit received in Algebra 1, or an equivalent course; Literature, or an equivalent course; or Biology 1, or an equivalent course, the school entity must determine whether the student's performance on the coursework and assessments that are aligned with the state academic standards assessed by each Keystone Exam satisfy the statewide graduation requirement.

9. What notifications must school entities provide to inform students, parents, and guardians of high school graduation requirements?

Each school entity shall ensure students, parents and guardians are notified of the school entity's high school graduation requirements, including requirements established in law and regulations and any additional requirements established by the school entity, and shall publish its high school graduation requirements on its publicly accessible website.

10. Must school entities report to the Department the number of graduates and how each student met statewide graduation requirements?

No later than December 1, 2022, and each December 1 thereafter, each school entity must submit a report on the number of students who graduated and a summary of how proficiency was met by those students. More information will be forthcoming on the method of reporting in future guidance.