



HISTORY AND CURRENT STATUS OF KEYSTONE EXAMS IN PENNSYLVANIA

In 2010, Pennsylvania passed a law that supported the creation of 10 end-of-course assessments, known as “Keystone Exams,” in the following subject areas: Algebra I, Algebra II, Geometry, Literature, English Composition, Biology, Chemistry, U.S. History, World History, and Civics and Government. These exams would serve two purposes: (1) establishing high school graduation requirements for students throughout the state; and (2) providing a way for the state and the federal government to hold high schools accountable for educating students.

Students began taking the tests in 2012, with a plan to have Keystones become a graduation requirement in 2017. However, as of 2016, only three of the 10 exams had been developed – Algebra 1, Biology, and Literature.

One of the reasons for the delay in test development is that students have not performed well on the tests. Student scores are classified as Below Basic, Basic, Proficient, or Advanced. More students than expected scored Below Basic or Basic. This left many districts scrambling to provide supplemental classes and services to students in an effort to improve students’ scores so that they could graduate.

Additionally, state Regulations allow students who are unable to score “Proficient” on a Keystone exam after two attempts to try to demonstrate proficiency through the completion of a “Project Based Assessment.” Again, districts had to work to design appropriate projects and had to determine how to measure “proficiency” on them.

In February 2016, Pennsylvania delayed the requirement of passing Keystone exams in order for a student to be eligible to graduate. Students were still required to take the exams, with limited exceptions, but they did not have to pass them. Current law requires proficiency on Keystone exams for students graduating with the Class of 2019 and thereafter, instead of 2017. These students will need to take and pass tests in Algebra 1, Biology, and Literature. Pennsylvania will add one

additional mandatory test each year beginning in 2020 (if funds allow).

Although Pennsylvania law does not require Keystone Proficiency for graduation until 2019, some school districts are going forward with requiring Keystone proficiency for students graduating in 2017. Districts are allowed to have more stringent graduation requirements than the state requires. Given this unique situation, it is important that students and parents check with their local school district to determine specific district requirements for graduation.

Related Articles:

- [Graduation Requirements in Pennsylvania](#)
- [Taking a Keystone Exam](#)
- [Project Based Assessments](#)
- [Graduation Requirements for Pennsylvania Students with IEPs](#)
- [GED Testing](#)

Additional Resources:

- [Keystone Exams from the Pennsylvania Department of Education](#)
- [Pennsylvania Public School Code Chapter 4 on Academic Standards and Assessments](#)
- [Pennsylvania Public School Code Chapter 4 on High School Graduation Requirements](#) (note that Senate Bill 880 delays the implementation of this law)
- [Senate Bill 880 on Keystone Exam Two Year Delay](#)
- [Waiver of Graduation Requirements Effective 2017: An Analysis](#)
- [Elementary and Secondary Education Act](#)

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