

Keystone Exam Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What are Keystone Exams?

Keystone Exams are state mandated end-of-course tests designed for two purposes: 1) to determine high schools' Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) status as part of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) accountability requirements, and 2) for students in the Class of 2017 and beyond to demonstrate proficiency in core subjects as a graduation requirement.

Q: What courses have a related Keystone Exam?

Literature, Algebra I, and Biology are the first three Keystone Exams that will be implemented, and they are connected to English II, Algebra I, and Biology courses respectively.

The state is proposing to develop other exams as part of the graduation requirement in future years which include but are not limited to Composition (2019) and Civics and Government (2020).

The state is also proposing to develop five Keystone Exams that will be available for voluntary use: Geometry, U.S. History, Algebra II, Chemistry, and World History.

Q: Who has to take Keystone Exams?

In the 2012-13 school year, all 11th grade students must take all three Keystone Exams, regardless of when or whether they have completed English II, Algebra I, and Biology courses. For example, an 11th grade student in 2012-13 may have taken an Algebra I course in 9th grade and Biology and English II courses in 10th grade. That student must take all three Keystone Exams related to those courses in 2012-13 as an 11th grader.

If 11th grade students in your school have not yet completed Keystone course(s), they should be rostered for the course(s) in 2012-13 and complete the Keystone Exam(s) for the course(s) during their 11th grade year.

Additionally, any current 8th, 9th, or 10th grade student enrolled in English II, Algebra I, or Biology is required to take the respective Keystone Exam for the course upon completion.

Finally, all students in the Class of 2017 (current 8th graders) and beyond will have to take the Keystone Exams upon completion of the respective courses and demonstrate proficiency in order to be eligible to graduate high school.

Q: How soon will Keystone Exams be administered?

The Literature, Algebra I, and Biology Keystone Exams will be administered starting in the 2012-2013 school year.

Q: Will Keystone Exams replace the PSSA tests?

The Keystone Exams will replace the PSSA test for 11th grade students only beginning in the 2012-13 school year. 3rd-8th grade students will continue to take the PSSA.

Note: 8th graders enrolled in Algebra I in 2012-13 will take both the 8th grade PSSA Reading & Math test and the Algebra I Keystone Exam in the Spring of 2013.

Q: When do students have to take the Keystone Exam?

The Keystone Exams are end-of-course exams attached to particular courses, not to particular grade levels. Beginning in the 2012-13 school year, any student who completes an English II, Algebra I, or Biology course has to take the corresponding Keystone Exam in the same school year that the course is completed, regardless of the student's grade level. For example, if an 8th grade student completes an Algebra I course, that student has to take the Algebra I Keystone Exam in 8th grade. If a student doesn't complete an Algebra I course until 10th grade, that student has to take the Algebra I Keystone exam in 10th grade.

The exception to the rule applies to the 11th grade students in 2012-13. All of these students have to take all three Keystone Exams in 2012-13 regardless of when they completed the relevant courses. This exception exists so that there will be 11th grade student results that can be used to determine AYP status for 2012-13.

Note: It is recommended that 11th graders test during the winter administration, so that they have an opportunity to retake the exam in the spring if they do not score proficient.

Keystone Exams will be administered in winter and spring test windows. Refer to the 2012-2013 Keystone Assessment Schedule document to learn which students will test in each of the windows.

Q: How are Keystone Exams related to high school AYP calculations?

Scores from only the Literature and Algebra I Keystone Exams will determine AYP. Schools are required to administer the Biology exam as part of the NCLB science requirement, but Biology scores will not factor into a school's AYP status.

Only 11th grade students' results will be used to calculate AYP. Non-11th grade students' results will be banked until the students are in their 11th grade year.

Q: Does this mean that the state will be applying test results from middle school students to determine high school AYP status?

Yes. If a student completes a course aligned to a Keystone Exam during the middle school years, the proficiency outcome will be banked until the student becomes an 11th grader.

Q: If some students will test prior to 11th grade but AYP will not be calculated until 11th grade, how will their scores be attributed?

A student's scores will be attributed to the school that he/she attends as an 11th grader, since AYP reporting will continue to occur in 11th grade.

Q: How are Keystone Exams related to high school graduation requirements?

In order to graduate high school, students in the Class of 2017 and beyond must demonstrate proficiency in Literature, Algebra I, and Biology by passing the respective Keystone Exams. *(Students graduating before 2017 will be required to take the Keystone Exams for AYP purposes, but they do not have to score proficient on any of the exams in order to graduate.)*

Q: Does this mean that the state will be applying test results from middle school students to high school graduation requirements?

Yes. If a student completes a course aligned to a Keystone Exam during the middle school years, the proficiency outcome will be used to determine eligibility for a high school diploma.

Q: What happens if a student is not proficient?

11th grade students who test during the Winter 2012 Keystone Exam window and who do not score proficient or advanced will re-take the Keystone Exam in the Spring of 2013.

Students in the Class of 2017 and beyond who do not score Proficient or Advanced on a Keystone Exam must receive remedial instruction and must retake the Keystone Exam until a proficient score is achieved. Students who do not score proficient or above after two attempts will be eligible to demonstrate proficiency through the completion of a project-based assessment.

Please Note: Each Keystone Exam has two modules, and overall proficiency is determined by the combined score of the two modules. For example, a student could score proficient or better on module 1 and not score proficient or better on module 2 but still be considered proficient or advanced on the overall test if the combined score was high enough. If a student takes the exam more than once, the student's best overall score will be used. The student's best overall score is a combination of both module 1 and module 2. The best overall score may be derived from multiple test administrations.

Q: Do students in the class of 2017 and 2018 who already took Algebra I need to take the Algebra I Keystone for graduation requirements since they already took the course prior to Keystone testing beginning?

Any student in the class of 2017 and beyond who took a Keystone related course when there was no Keystone Exam available does not have to take the Keystone Exam for purposes of graduation; however, these students are still required to take the Keystone exam for purposes of accountability (NCLB/AYP).

Q: Can an individual student opt out of a Keystone Exam?

No. The regulations do not permit this.

Q: Will there be testing accommodations for students with special needs?

As with the PSSA tests, students with special needs may take Keystone Exams with accommodations described in the PDE’s Accommodation Guidelines consistent with a student’s Individualized Education Plan.

Q: What is the calculator policy for the Keystones?

The calculator policy for Keystone Exams is identical to the policy used for the PSSA. If a student chooses to use a calculator on the Keystone Exams (other than the online calculator options), the student must adhere to the guidelines listed below. It is incumbent upon the School Test Coordinator to ensure all calculator policies are implemented and followed.

The following are NOT allowed for the Keystone Exams.

- Non-calculators such as cell phones, PDAs, laptops, minicomputers, pocket organizers, etc.
- Calculators with beaming capabilities, unless the beaming capabilities are disabled
- Calculators with wireless communication technologies, unless the wireless communication technologies are disabled
- Calculators with QWERTY keyboards, typewriter-like keyboards, or keypads (e.g., Dvorak)
- Calculators with built in Computer Algebra Systems – CAS
- Calculators that make noise, have paper tape, need to be plugged in, or talk; these specific calculators can only be used as a required accommodation as stated in the Accommodations Manual
- Calculators shared by students during a test session
- Any and all pre-installed, non-factory programs in a calculator

This Calculator Policy is intended to be a general description of what is not allowed. It is not meant to be an exhaustive list of specific calculators, devices, or technologies that cannot be used on the Keystone Exams. Please note as technology changes, this policy may also change.

Q: I have further questions. Whom shall I contact?

Contact The School District of Philadelphia Office of Assessment:
215-400-4250 or assessment@philasd.org

Or, for further information please visit the link below:
[Pennsylvania Department of Education SAS Portal on Keystones](#)