

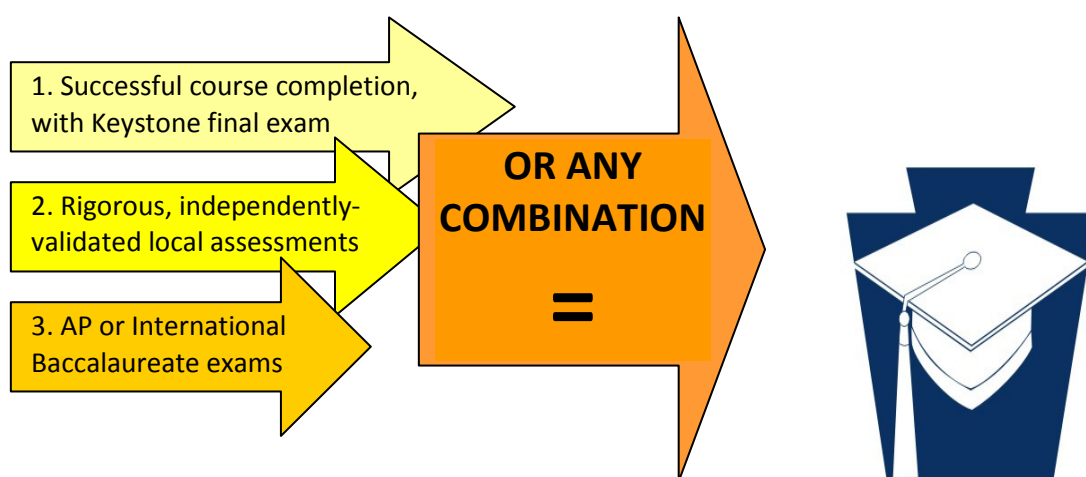
# STRONGER HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

## Fact Sheet and Frequently Asked Questions

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On January 8, 2010, following approvals by the state's Independent Regulatory Review Commission and the Attorney General, the State Board of Education published changes to Chapter 4 that set stronger, more consistent high school graduation requirements for students, beginning with the class of 2015.

Under the new regulation, students can meet graduation requirements through any or a combination of the following options:



**OPTION 1 – DEMONSTRATE PROFICIENCY CORE SUBJECTS:** For the class of 2014-15, students will demonstrate proficiency in English composition, literature, algebra I and biology, with a Keystone final exam counting for one-third of the final course grade. In 2017, requirements under this option will be expanded to include:

- passing 2 English courses (composition and literature);
- passing 2 math courses (algebra I, algebra II, or geometry);
- passing 1 science course (biology or chemistry); and
- passing 1 social studies course (options include civics, American history or world history).

Like existing final exams, Keystone Exams will be short (approximately 2 to 2 ½ hours), subject-specific assessments that students take at the end of a course. Unlike existing final exams, students will be able to retake the assessments in whole or in part and students who do not test well can complete a project-based alternative assessment. Under the regulation, no student will be denied a high school diploma based on test scores alone as teacher-assigned grades will constitute a majority (67%) of the course grade.

**OPTION 2 – PASS LOCAL ASSESSMENTS** that have been independently validated. This regulation preserves local control but sets consistent standards for locally-developed measures to ensure rigorous assessments, fair administration, and reliable results. The state will share validation costs with local districts.

**OPTION 3 – PASS RIGOROUS NATIONAL ASSESSMENTS** such as Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate exams.

Importantly, the regulation also responds to calls to reduce the amount of testing in Pennsylvania's high schools. Under this plan, beginning the 2012-13 school year, three Keystone Exams in algebra I, literature and biology will replace the 11th grade Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) tests. This change will reduce annual testing time by approximately 18 hours – the equivalent of three school days. The PSSA will be retained for use in the elementary and middle grades.

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### **LOCAL ASSESSMENT OPTION:**

- 1. Our district is planning to use locally-developed assessments to comply with the new regulation. Must local assessments count for one-third of a student's course grade?*

No. The state-designated 1/3 weight applies only to the state-developed Keystone Exams. The regulation does not set a weight for local assessments or Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate exams.

- 2. How will the state evaluate locally-developed assessments?*

For local assessments to satisfy state graduation requirements, they must meet the following criteria:

- 1) Alignment with state academic standards;
- 2) Rigorous expectations, comparable to those used for the Keystone Exams; and
- 3) Administration to all students, except for those exempted by Individualized Education Plans or Gifted Individualized Education Plans

Additional criteria will be established by the Local Assessment Validation Advisory Committee.

- 3. If a district plans to use local assessments for one subject, must they use local assessments for all subjects?*

No. The regulation permits districts to select assessment options by subject area from among the three options detailed on the previous page.

- 4. *If a district decides to use only local assessments for graduation determinations, will these count for AYP when the PSSA is replaced by the Keystone exams?***

No. Provided the U.S. Department of Education approves Keystone exams for AYP/NCLB purposes, students will have to take those Keystone exams (algebra 1, literature, and biology) to meet AYP/NCLB requirements and local assessments to meet state graduation requirements.

## **KEYSTONE EXAMS:**

- 1. *Can students retake a Keystone Exam?***

Yes. The regulation permits students who do not score proficient or above to retake the exam (or exam module) at the next available testing date.

- 2. *Can a student who scores proficient or advanced retake a Keystone Exam?***

The regulation does not preclude proficient or advanced students from re-taking a Keystone Exam.

- 3. *Can students “test-out” of a course by passing a Keystone Exam?***

Yes, at the district’s discretion and provided that the student scores “Advanced” on the related Keystone.

- 4. *What is the process and timeline for replacing the 11<sup>th</sup> grade PSSA with Keystone Exams?***

The process requires PDE to document, collect, and submit evidence of test development and test quality for USDE peer review. We anticipate approval by 2013.

- 5. *Will Keystone Exam scores for students in middle school count toward high school graduation requirements?***

Yes. For example, if a student takes the Keystone algebra I exam in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, it will count for one-third of that final mark. If the student passes the course, he/she will have met the requirement for graduation.

- 6. *When will the Keystone Exam scores for students in middle school count toward AYP?***

For purposes of AYP, Keystone Exam scores will be attributed in 11<sup>th</sup> grade – even though students may – and likely, will – take the relevant courses and keystones in an earlier grade.

***What is the timeline for developing Keystone Exams and other voluntary instructional resources?***

Please see the table below:

<b>KEYSTONE EXAM DEVELOPMENT SCHEDULE</b>		
<b>Keystone Exam</b>	<b>Field Test</b>	<b>Available for all schools...</b>
Algebra I, Biology, Literature	Fall/Winter 2010	Spring 2011
Algebra II, Geometry, Composition, US History	Spring 2011	Winter 2011/2012
Chemistry, Civics & Government, World History	Spring 2015	TBD
<b>CLASSROOM DIAGNOSTIC TOOLS DEVELOPMENT SCHEDULE</b>		
<b>Content Area</b>	<b>Field Test</b>	<b>Available for all schools...</b>
Mathematics	Springs 2010	Fall 2010
Literacy: Literature	Fall 2010	Winter 2010/2011
Science	Fall 2010	Winter 2010/2011
Literacy: Composition	Spring 2011	Fall 2011
Social Studies	Spring 2011	Fall 2011

## **AP/IB OPTIONS:**

*What score is required on an AP or IB test to satisfy graduation requirements?*

The Department will issue policy guidance on this question by July 1, 2010.

## **ALTERNATIVE PATHWAYS:**

### ***1. How will students qualify to complete a project-based assessment?***

Any student who does not score proficient on a Keystone Exam after two attempts will be eligible to complete a project-based assessment, provided the student has taken the course and met local attendance and supplemental instruction requirements.

### ***2. Can a student who scores proficient or advanced complete a project-based assessment to raise their score?***

The project-based assessment is designed expressly to help students supplement a Keystone Exam score in order to meet the graduation requirement of proficiency. A project-based assessment can raise a student's Keystone score to the proficient cut score, but not beyond it.

### ***3. If a project-based assessment raises a student's Keystone score, will that proficient score count toward AYP?***

No. The score from a student's original exam is used for the purpose of determining AYP.

### ***4. How will the Secretary evaluate waiver requests based on extenuating circumstances?***

The regulation includes a waiver provision – modeled on the policy used in Massachusetts – that allows the Secretary to exempt individual students from the new graduation requirements based on personal or family crisis or other extenuating circumstances. The waiver request must be accompanied by an endorsement from the student's local superintendent. The Department will issue additional policy guidance on this question by July 1, 2010.