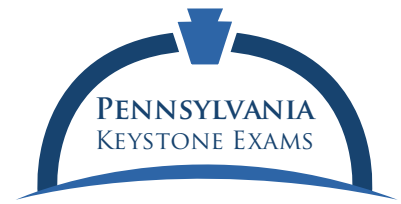


Information for Parents or Guardians

Pennsylvania Keystone Exams



What are the Keystone Exams?

The Keystone Exams are the assessment portion of Pennsylvania's new system of high school graduation requirements. The exams will help school districts guide students toward meeting state standards—standards aligned with expectations for success in college and the workplace. The exams are end-of-course assessments designed to evaluate proficiency in Algebra I, Algebra II, Biology, Chemistry, Civics and Government, English Composition, Geometry, Literature, U.S. History, and World History. These exams will be rolled out over the next five years, beginning with Algebra I, Biology, and Literature Keystone Exams in May 2011.

Who will participate in the Keystone Exams?

The State Board of Education set new high school graduation requirements that can be met through a combination of several options, one of which is successful course completion with a Keystone Exam as its final exam. For districts that choose to use the Keystone Exams to meet the requirements for graduation, students in the graduating classes of 2015 who are enrolled in Algebra I, Biology, or Literature during the 2010-2011 school year must participate in the Keystone Exams. It is recommended that students take the Keystone Exam near the end of the related course, which may be as early as grade 6. If students do not score Proficient, they can retake the exam any of the three times it is administered during the following year. Ultimately, the Algebra I, Literature, and Biology Keystone Exams will replace the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) tests in mathematics, reading, and science in 11th grade for purposes of making AYP determinations.

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 prior to the start of each school year.

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?

Each Keystone Exam is organized into two major Reporting Categories known as Modules. Each Module is organized around specific Assessment Anchors and Eligible Content within a subject area. Assessment Anchors and Eligible Content are statements that clarify the standards assessed on the Keystone and serve as one tool to align curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices. All questions on the Keystone Exams are aligned to the Keystone Assessment Anchors and Eligible Content, which can be found on the SAS website at www.pdesas.org/Standard/Views.

Who administers the Keystone Exams?

Each school chooses the person(s) who will administer each Keystone Exam. In most cases, these are the students' teachers, who are often helped by the principal or a guidance counselor.

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 3.5 hours to complete. 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.

Will students have an opportunity to experience online testing before taking a Keystone Exam online?

Tutorials and online training programs have been developed for the Keystone Exams. The PA Online Assessment Student Tutorial uses pictures, motion, and sound to present visual and verbal descriptions of the properties and features of the PA Online Assessment system. Students are allowed to repeat the Student Tutorial as often as desired and needed. The Online Tools Training (OTT) provides an introductory experience using the PA online assessment software allowing students to observe and try out features of the PA online assessment software prior to the actual assessment. Within the OTT, students also have the opportunity to practice typing responses in a narrative format, graphing functions, and entering equations using an equation builder tool. The online exam also has a “Help” feature that is available to the student during the exam.

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. Districts will continue to calculate course grades and will inform students of final grades using their usual process. For graduating seniors, Keystone Exam scores will be available no later than 10 days prior to graduation. For all other students, scores will be available before the end of the school year.

Two copies of the individual student report for all Keystone Exams will be sent to the school districts and charter schools for distribution to parents, teachers, guidance counselors, and/or principals. The state will not receive any report with individual names included.

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 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.

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).

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