PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Keystone Exams
Draft Performance Level Descriptors

OVERVIEW

Performance Level Descriptors (PLDs) are statements that describe the knowledge and skills expected of students at different performance levels with respect to Pennsylvania's Academic Content Standards and Eligible Content for each of the Keystone end-of-course exams. The descriptors are used to guide the standard-setting process for each of the Keystones, and they are instrumental to the validity and defensibility of the standard-setting process. Following Standard Setting, the final performance level descriptors for each of the Keystone Exams were approved by the Pennsylvania Board of Education.

PLDs were developed and reviewed by committees of Pennsylvania educators consistent with the recently enacted Chapter 4 regulation. During this process, educators reviewed what students in Pennsylvania should know and be able to do based on the respective Keystone Assessment Anchor Content Standards. They also reviewed how students will demonstrate this knowledge and skill based on the respective Keystone Eligible Content, including the level of knowledge and skill necessary for each performance level. Educators made an initial determination relating to the

- necessary characteristics/concepts of performance at each level;
- categorization of the characteristics/concepts;
- definition in clear and easily understood language of each characteristic/concept; and
- description of the performance continuum.

Once the initial drafts of the descriptors were developed, the educators were asked to provide a critique of the following. *Was each descriptor*

- *an appropriate description of the performance level?*
- *inappropriate for the specific Keystone Exam because the description of the performance level might be too demanding?*
- *inappropriate because the description of the performance level might be inconsistent with the expectation of high standards for the given Keystone Exam?*
- *inappropriate because the description of the performance level might be too easy?*

Feedback and responses from the educator panels informed the revisions, which are reflected in final documents.

Please note that these PLDs, along with the cut scores, were approved by the State Board of Education in summer 2011.

Basic	Proficient	Advanced
A Literature student performing at this level demonstrates some use of reading strategies to comprehend fiction and nonfiction. Students performing at this level consistently demonstrate a partial understanding of fiction and nonfiction within and between texts. They use limited reading skills and strategies to construct meaning. Students demonstrate comprehension through the use of word meanings, contextual clues, and literary terms. They demonstrate some understanding of text structures and the content of graphics. Students identify and explain the author's purpose and techniques.	**A Literature student performing at this level demonstrates a consistent use of effective reading strategies to comprehend fiction and nonfiction.** Students performing at this level consistently demonstrate an adequate understanding of fiction and nonfiction within and between texts. They construct meaning by applying appropriate reading strategies and knowledge of literary terms, structures, and genres. Students make and support reasonable assertions and draw conclusions based on textual and contextual evidence. They analyze the author's purpose and techniques, including the effects on the reader.	**A Literature student performing at this level demonstrates a thorough use of sophisticated reading strategies to comprehend fiction and nonfiction.** Students performing at this level consistently demonstrate a thorough understanding of fiction and nonfiction. They use in-depth knowledge of literature to construct original interpretations, to draw insightful conclusions, and to make connections within, between, and beyond texts. Students demonstrate subtle literary and conceptual understanding of texts and analyze the contexts in which they were written. They demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of style, structure, genre, and purpose.
A student at this level is able to do the following: • Identifies the author's purpose. • Identifies word meaning through the use of synonyms and antonyms. • Applies the use of affixes and context clues to clarify the meaning of words. • Identifies and/or explains stated or implied main idea and supporting details. • Summarizes text. • Makes inferences and draws conclusions. • Explains and/or describes connections between texts. • Describes, explains, and/or compares the following elements of fiction: character, setting, plot, theme, tone, style, mood, and point of view. • Identifies the literary elements and devices in fiction, including poetry and drama. • Identifies the structure and format of informational text. • Interprets and/or analyzes sequence of steps. • Explains the effect of text organization, including headers, graphics, and charts in informational text. • Makes connections between text and the content of graphics and charts. • Differentiates between fact and opinion in nonfictional text. • Explains and/or describes the use of facts and opinions in text. • Identifies and/or explains bias and propaganda techniques in nonfictional text.	**A student at this level is able to do the following:** • Explains examples of text that support the author's purpose. • Draws conclusions about connotations of words. • Supports generalizations by citing evidence from text. • Analyzes how literary form influences the meaning of text. • Compares characteristics of fiction and literary nonfiction. • Analyzes and/or compares connections between texts. • Compares the characteristics that distinguish narrative, poetry, and drama. • Interprets and/or analyzes the following elements of literature: character, setting, plot, theme, tone, style, mood, and point of view. • Explains literary elements and devices in fiction, including poetry and drama. • Explains author's use of key words and phrases to inform and influence the reader. • Analyzes the structure and format of informational text. • Interprets and/or analyzes the effect of text organization, including headers, graphics, and charts in informational text. • Interprets and/or analyzes the use of fact and opinion and bias and propaganda techniques in nonfictional text. • Distinguishes between essential and nonessential information in informational text. • Explains and/or describes the effectiveness of bias and propaganda techniques and an author's defense of a claim or argument in nonfictional text.	**A student at this level is able to do the following:** • Analyzes the author's purpose. • Evaluates how authors use techniques and elements to communicate an idea or concept. • Evaluates connections between texts. • Analyzes how interrelationships of ideas and events influence each other. • Evaluates the following elements of literature and their interactions with each other: character, setting, plot, theme, tone, style, mood, and point of view. • Evaluates the characteristics that distinguish narrative, poetry, and drama. • Interprets and analyzes genres for literary, historical, and/or cultural significance. • Analyzes the effects of literary elements and devices in fiction, including poetry and drama. • Evaluates the structure and format of complex informational text. • Evaluates how graphics and charts clarify, simplify, and organize complex informational text. • Analyzes the effectiveness of bias and propaganda techniques and an author's defense of a claim or argument in nonfictional text.