



Pottsgrove School District

Keystone Exams

As required by the state, Keystone Exams have been administered to students in the Pottsgrove School District during the current school year. Following state guidelines, all 11th grade students participated in the Algebra 1, Literature, and Biology Keystone Exams in December 2012. During this December testing window, all 9th and 10th graders who completed an Algebra 1 course in a previous year also participated in the Algebra 1 Keystone Exam, unless a score of proficient or advanced was earned by the student while in middle school. In May 2013, all high school and middle school students currently enrolled in Algebra 1, American Literature, and Biology will be required to take the related exams. Keystone Exams are state-required tests currently planned for three purposes: student accountability, school accountability, and teacher accountability.

Student accountability. For all students in the classes of 2017 (current grade 8) and below, passing the Keystone Exams in Algebra 1, Literature, and Biology will be a state requirement for graduation. Because the ability to earn a diploma is tied to proficiency on these exams, all students in grade 8 and below who do not achieve a score of proficient or advanced will be required to participate in remediation and retesting.

For students in grade 8 and below who do not score proficient or advanced, the remediation courses will automatically be placed on student schedules beginning in 2013-14. Students will receive focused instruction on areas in need of growth prior to retesting. After two unsuccessful Keystone Exam attempts, a student will be eligible to participate in a project-based alternative to satisfy the graduation requirement.

School accountability. The state requires all students to take Keystone Exams in Algebra 1, Literature, and Biology to measure the effectiveness of all schools. Results for each school are gathered and published annually. Beginning with the 2012-13 school year, the state will also create a School Performance Profile which provides a score between 0 and 100 for all public schools. Although multiple measures of student achievement are used, Keystone Exam results comprise a major component of the score assigned to each high school.

The first requirement is that all students must participate in the Algebra 1, Literature, and Biology Keystone Exams at least once before the end of 11th grade. **This means that all students currently in grades 9-11 will be required to take the Keystone Exams for the purposes of school accountability, even though the exams are not a graduation requirement for these students.**

The state is permitting at the discretion of local districts, remediation and retesting for all students in grades 9-11 who do not demonstrate proficiency after taking each test the first time. If a student receives a higher score on a subsequent test, the best scores for each student are incorporated into the School Performance Profile score. As a result, schools may choose to test, remediate, and retest students until the highest possible Keystone Exam scores are achieved.

Teacher accountability. Beginning in the 2013-14 school year, School Performance Profile scores will be incorporated into the evaluation of each teacher in a particular school. The school's profile score will comprise 15% of all teacher ratings for each teacher assigned to the school. In 2014-15 and beyond, the profile scores will also be incorporated into principal evaluations at the same percentage. The use of student achievement data to evaluate teachers and principals was enacted into law by the state legislature in June 2012.

The Pottsgrove School District has demonstrated a tradition of excellence that transcends performance on high stakes tests. Students regularly graduate on time, and nearly all students attend two- or four-year colleges. The courses offered in all grades provide a rich educational experience that develops competencies in many skills that are not measured by Keystone Exams, including creativity, collaboration, critical thinking skills, and technological skills. Our primary goal is to maintain this essence of a Pottsgrove education. We will continue to work with students to meet the requirements for school accountability, while minimizing the collective impact of exam preparation, remediation, and retesting on instructional time. For the students in 8th grade and below who are required by the state to pass Keystone Exams to graduate, we will work diligently to give each student the best chance for success.

For the past several years, the state has provided mixed messages about Keystone Exam requirements. Each new school year has brought changes to the testing mandates. As new information is released, we may be required to modify the District position. We will continue to keep families informed as new developments occur. The District thanks the entire community for your continued support of the students of Pottsgrove.

Frequently Asked Questions on Keystone Exams

A list of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) from Pottsgrove parents and community members is provided below. In July and August 2012 the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) released additional important information about Keystone Exam requirements.

Q: What are Keystone Exams?

Keystone Exams are state-mandated end-of-course tests intended as a measurement of proficiency for students in identified subjects. Keystone Exams are used by the state for two purposes:

1. Students in the classes of 2017 (current grade 8) and below will be required to pass certain Keystone Exams to earn a high school diploma.
2. High schools will be held accountable for the participation and performance of all students on the Literature, Algebra 1, and Biology Keystone Exams to satisfy the requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind Act.

Q: What subjects have a related Keystone Exam?

Keystone Exams have been developed for Literature, Algebra 1, and Biology. Pending state funding, additional exams are currently being developed for Composition, Geometry, Algebra 2, Chemistry, World History, U.S. History, and Civics and Government.

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

All students graduating in 2017 (current grade 8) and below must demonstrate proficiency in Literature, Algebra 1, and Biology. Beginning with the class of 2019 (current grade 6), the Composition Exam will be added to the graduation requirements. Students graduating in 2020 (current grade 5) and beyond may also be required to demonstrate proficiency on the Civics and Government Keystone Exam. Exams in the other subjects will be made available to schools but are not currently planned as graduation requirements. All Keystone Exams except Literature, Algebra I, and Biology must receive legislative funding in order to be developed and implemented.

Q: Does this information 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 state requires the proficiency outcome to be used to determine eligibility for a high school diploma.

Q: When do students take Keystone Exams?

Keystone Exams are attached to a particular course, not a student's grade level. These tests are designed to be administered like final exams at the completion of the related course. For example, Algebra 1 is taken by both middle school and high school students. The Keystone Exam will be administered at the end of the Algebra 1 course regardless of the grade level of the student.

The state requires that all students complete the Algebra 1, Literature, and Biology Keystone Exams at least once by the end of the junior year. Therefore, students currently in 9th, 10th and 11th grades will take Keystone Exams to meet state requirements for school accountability, even though proficiency on these tests are not required for graduation for students in these grades.

Q: Which Keystone Exams will be administered to Pottsgrove students in 2012-13?

During the 2012-13 school year, three Keystone Exams will be administered: Literature, Algebra 1, and Biology. Following State guidelines, students will be tested according to this schedule:

- Grade 11: Algebra 1, Literature, Biology (December)
- Grade 10: Algebra 1 (December), Literature (May)
- Grade 9: Biology (May); Algebra 1 (December for students who have previously completed Algebra 1; May for students currently enrolled in Algebra 1)
- Grades 8 and below: Algebra 1 (May for all students currently enrolled in Algebra 1)

Q: Have the Keystone Exams replaced the 11th grade PSSA tests?

Yes. PSSA tests will remain in place in grades 3-8.

Q: My child took the Algebra 1 Keystone Exam when it was first offered during the 2010-11 school year. Is my child required to retake the test?

Students who were scored proficient or advanced on the Algebra I Keystone Exam in May 2011 will not need to be retested.

Q: Can individual students opt out of Keystone Exams?

No. The state regulations do not permit this. As with PSSA tests, parents may review Keystone Exams per state regulations and opt out for religious reasons only.

Q: Can a student earn credit for a course by passing a Keystone Exam without taking the course?

The District has no plans to enable students to earn credit for a course by examination.

Q: What happens if a student is not proficient?

Students in grades 8 and below who do not achieve a proficient score will be scheduled in a supplemental remedial course in 2013-14. These students will retake the test until proficiency is demonstrated. A project-based assessment will be available if these students still have not demonstrated proficiency after two unsuccessful attempts. Current high school students are permitted, but not required, to receive remediation and/or retake the Keystone Exams if a score of basic or below basic was achieved on the first attempt.

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 the accommodations listed in a student Individualized Education Plan, subject to any limitations the state applies to a particular test.

Q: Will colleges and universities view success on Keystone Exams as an advantage during the college admissions process?

Current information counselors have shared about college acceptance patterns indicates that state test results are not important factors in acceptance decisions.

Q: Will my child be prepared for Keystone Exams?

District courses aligned with Keystone Exams are designed to address the requirements of these tests. Students who are required to take a Keystone Exam after already completing the course shall be provided with further information about Keystone Exams from their teachers. Information about the test structure, subject content, and released test items will be made available.

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

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