GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS IN PENNSYLVANIA

August 2023

Beginning last year with the graduating class of 2023, new statewide graduation requirements went into effect for all public school students in Pennsylvania.[1] As a result, every student must satisfy <u>one</u> of several pathways to demonstrate preparedness for college and career and receive a high school diploma. Schools must provide additional details about each of these graduation pathways and how they are being implemented in that school.

The pathways to meet graduation requirements include:

1. *Keystone Proficiency*
   A student must score **Proficient or Advanced** on each of the three Keystone exams — Algebra I, Literature, and Biology.
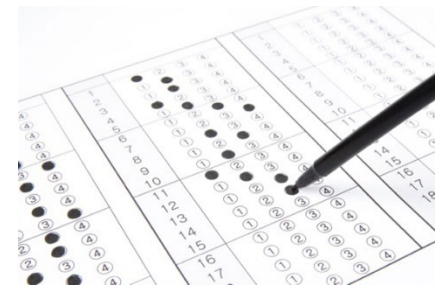
2. *Keystone Composite*
   A student must earn a **satisfactory composite score of 4452** on the Algebra I, Literature, and Biology Keystone exams. In addition, a student must obtain a Proficient or Advanced score (1500 or greater) on at least one of those three exams and no Keystone exam score of Below Basic.

3. *Alternative Assessment*
   Successful completion of locally established grade-based requirements for academic content areas associated with each Keystone exam on which the student did not achieve proficiency **and <u>one</u>** of the following:

   (A) Attainment of an established score on an approved alternate assessment (SAT, PSAT, ACT, ASVAB)
   - Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT): score of 1010
   - PSAT: score of 970
   - ACT: score of 21
   - Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery exam: the minimum score to gain admittance to a branch of the armed services in the year the student graduates.

   (B) Attainment of an established score on an Advanced Placement (AP) program in an academic content area associated with each Keystone exam on which the student did not achieve at least a proficient score.

   (C) Successful completion of a college-in-high school (CHS) course in an academic content area associated with each Keystone exam in which the student did not achieve at least a proficient score.

   (D) Successful completion of a pre-apprenticeship program.

   (E) Acceptance in an accredited four-year nonprofit institution of higher education and evidence of the ability to enroll in college-level coursework.

4. *Career and Technical Pathway*
   A student must earn a passing grade on the courses associated with each Keystone exam **and** attain an industry-based competency certification related to the program of study;

   or demonstrate either:

   a. Readiness for continued meaningful engagement in the program of study, or
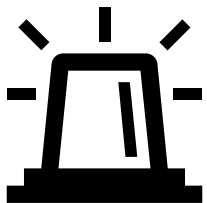   b. A high likelihood of success on an approved industry-based assessment.

5. *Evidence-Based Pathway*
   A student must earn a passing grade on the courses associated with each Keystone exam **and** demonstrate readiness for postsecondary engagement through three pieces of evidence from the student's career portfolio aligned to student goals and career plan. Examples of evidence include ACT WorkKeys, SAT subject tests, AP, International Baccalaureate, and concurrent coursework, higher education acceptance, community learning project, industry-recognized credentials, successful completion of an internship, externship, or co-op, or a guarantee of full-time employment or military enlistment.

For more information on statewide graduation requirements, visit the Act 158 page **of the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) website,** and utilize PDE's flowchart.

WAIVERS AVAILABLE

At the discretion of a school superintendent or other chief school administrator, a school may waive the state's high school graduation requirements on a case-by-case basis for good cause. Waivers may be granted for a student in grade 12 to accommodate a student who experiences extenuating circumstances (*e.g.*, serious illness, death in the student's immediate family, family emergency, frequent school transfers, transfer from out-of-state in grade 12). This applies to high school graduation requirements set forth in 22 Pa. Code § 4.24 and includes waiver of the Keystone exam proficiency requirements or alternative pathway graduation requirements. Students granted waivers are still required to successfully complete locally established, grade-based requirements for academic content areas associated with each Keystone exam in order to meet statewide graduation requirements.[2]

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES CAN STILL GRADUATE THROUGH THEIR IEP

Any student with a disability who satisfactorily completes a special education program developed by an individualized education program (IEP) team and who does not otherwise meet the new statewide requirements (Act 158 or Act 6) shall be provided a regular high school diploma. Students who graduate in this manner are not considered to have been granted waivers under Act 158.[3] A student with a disability also has the right to participate in commencement ceremonies with the student's graduating class and receive a certificate of attendance even if the student is not graduating until later.[4]

Students with disabilities are eligible to remain in school and receive special education until they graduate with a diploma or their 22nd birthday.[5] If a student with a disability turned 21 during the 2023-23 school year and exited school without a diploma, the student may reenroll in school until their 22nd birthday.[6] In these cases, the student's IEP should be revised to provide appropriate programming, including a plan for graduation with a diploma, to be completed until the student's 22nd birthday.[7]

ENGLISH LEARNERS AND STATE ASSESSMENTS

All English learners (ELs) are required to participate in the Mathematics PSSA or Algebra I Keystone exam and the Science PSSA or Biology Keystone exam, with accommodations as appropriate, regardless of their enrollment date.

However, an EL student whose enrollment in any U.S. public school is for fewer than 12 cumulative (not consecutive) months by the end of the year in which the PSSA ELA/Keystone Literature testing window occurs has an **option** to take the associated exam. Enrollment in a school in any U.S. territory, such as Puerto Rico, is not to be considered enrollment in a U.S. public school. **An EL may be exempted only once from participation in the PSSA ELA or Keystone Literature exam**. For example, if an EL student was exempt from participation during a previous test administration, the student must participate during the current testing window regardless of length of enrollment.[8]

An EL student who does not participate in the Keystone Literature exam as an 11th or 12th grade student must satisfy the requirements of Act 158 or Act 6 through a pathway that does not require Keystone proficiency. The Alternative Assessment, CTE Concentrator, and Evidence-Based Pathways require EL students to complete locally established grade-based requirements for academic content associated with each Keystone exam in which the student did not demonstrate proficiency.[9]

ADDITIONAL PATHWAYS TO GRADUATION FOR STUDENTS WHO EXPERIENCE EDUCATIONAL INSTABILITY

Act 1 of 2022 (codified at 24 P.S. § 13-1331.1) provides additional pathways to graduation and extra school supports for students experiencing homelessness or students who have been involved in the foster care or juvenile justice systems. This law requires schools to accept full and partial credits a student earned in a prior school and to consider waiving locally required courses or consider how a student may demonstrate proficiency to earn credit in a different manner. If a student cannot fulfill all the courses required for graduation at their current school, the student may graduate from a prior school or, as a last resort, apply for a statewide diploma. To learn more about this important law, refer to this Act 1 fact sheet and these advocacy tools.

LEARN MORE!

To learn more about these requirements, check your school district or charter school's policies regarding graduation. You can also learn more about statewide graduation requirements through the Pennsylvania Department of Education's guidance documents and toolkit.

The Education Law Center-PA (ELC) is a nonprofit, legal advocacy organization with offices in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, dedicated to ensuring that all children in Pennsylvania have access to a quality public education. Through legal representation, impact litigation, community engagement, and policy advocacy, ELC advances the rights of underserved children, including children living in poverty, children of color, children in the foster care and juvenile justice systems, children with disabilities, multilingual learners, LGBTQ students, and children experiencing homelessness.

ELC's publications provide a general statement of the law. However, each situation is different. If questions remain about how the law applies to a particular situation, contact ELC's Helpline for information and advice — visit www.elc-pa.org/contact or call 215-238-6970 (Eastern and Central PA) or 412-258-2120 (Western PA) — or contact another attorney of your choice.

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[1] *See* Act 158 of 2018; Act 6 of 2017, 24 P.S. § 1-121; 22 Pa. Code § 4.51.

[2] 22 Pa. Code § 4.51d (Waivers).

[3] *See* Act 158 Pathways to Graduation Toolkit (2023), at https://pdesas.org/Frameworks/DCEToolKit/Act158PathwaysToGraduationToolkit.

[4] 24 P.S. 16-1614.

[5] 20 U.S.C. § 1412(a)(l)(A); 34 C.F.R. § 300.102(a)(3); *see also* IDEA Part B FAQ: Responses to Policy Revision to Age of Eligibility, Penn. Dept. of Educ., at https://www.education.pa.gov/Pages/IDEABFAQ.aspx.

[6] *Id.*

[7] *Id.*

[8] *See* Pennsylvania Department of Education, Accommodations Guidelines for English Learners (ELs) (2023), at https://www.education.pa.gov/Documents/K-12/Assessment%20and%20Accountability/PSSA/Accommodations/Accommodations%20Guidelines%20for%20ELs.pdf.

[9] *See* Act 158 Pathways to Graduation Toolkit (2023), at https://pdesas.org/Frameworks/DCEToolKit/Act158PathwaysToGraduationToolkit.