

STATEWIDE GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

August 2021

Beginning with the graduating class of 2023, new statewide graduation requirements will apply to all public school students.¹ As a result, every student must satisfy one of several pathways to demonstrate postsecondary preparedness in order to receive a diploma. Two of these options require a student to demonstrate proficiency or satisfactory completion of end-of-course Keystone Exams to satisfy the statewide graduation requirement. Here are all the pathways to meet the new requirements:

i. Keystone Proficiency:

A student must score proficient or advanced on each Keystone Exam - Algebra I, Literature, and Biology

ii. Keystone Satisfactory Composite:

A student must earn a satisfactory composite score on the Algebra I, Literature, and Biology Keystone Exams. This score will be determined by the PA Department of Education.

iii. Alternative Assessment:

A student must receive a passing grade on the courses associated with each Keystone Exam, and satisfactorily complete one of the following: an alternative assessment (SAT, PSAT, ACT, ASVAB, Gold Level ACT WorkKeys), advanced coursework (AP, IB, concurrent enrollment courses), pre-apprenticeship, or acceptance in a 4-year nonprofit institution of higher education for college-level coursework.

iv. Career and Technical Option:

A student must earn a passing grade on the courses associated with each Keystone Exam and pass the National Occupational Competency Testing Institute (NOCTI) or the National Institute of Metalworking Skills (NIMS) assessment in an approved career and technical education concentration.

v. Evidence-Based Option:

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 will include ACT WorkKeys, SAT subject tests, AP, IB and concurrent coursework, higher education acceptance, community learning project, completion of an internship, externship or co-op, or full-time employment.

WAIVERS AVAILABLE

A student in Grade 12 or any 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), may obtain a waiver of the Keystone Exam Proficiency

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

requirements or alternative pathway graduation requirements. This is at the discretion of a superintendent or other Chief School Administrator. 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.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Any student with a disability who satisfactorily completes a special education program developed by an individualized education program (IEP) team who does not otherwise meet the new statewide requirements (Act 158 or Act 6) shall be granted and issued a regular high school diploma.

ENGLISH LEARNERS

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 enrollment date.

However, an EL student whose enrollment in any US public school is 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 US territory, such as Puerto Rico, is not to be considered enrollment in a US 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.

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 another pathway other than the Keystone Proficiency or the Keystone Composite Pathways. The CTE Concentrator, Alternative Assessment, 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.

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 available at <https://www.education.pa.gov/K-12/Assessment%20and%20Accountability/GraduationRequirements/Act158/Pages/default.aspx>.

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, English 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.