

THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PHILADELPHIA
EDUCATION CENTER
440 N. BROAD STREET
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19130
CHIEF ACADEMIC OFFICE
OFFICE OF CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION AND ASSESSMENT

Dear Parent/Guardian:

The purpose of this letter is to inform you of a recent decision delaying the use of Keystone Exams (Algebra, Biology, and Literature) as a graduation requirement for students until SY 18-19.

On February 3, 2016, Governor Wolf signed Senate Bill 880 delaying the use of the Keystone Exams (Algebra, Biology, and Literature) as a graduation requirement until SY 18-19; however, The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) still requires all high school students be tested once in Math and Reading, and at grade-span intervals in Science. This means students are still required to take the Keystone Exams once. In addition, beginning in 2016-2017 school year, the performance level demonstrated in each of the Keystone Exams shall be included on your child's transcript.

The rationale, according to the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE), for a delay in applying Keystone Exams as a statewide graduation requirement is as follows:

- (1) Significantly higher numbers of students are failing to demonstrate proficiency on each of the Keystone Exams (Algebra 1, Biology, English/Language Arts) even after a retake.
- (2) Alternatives for students who did not demonstrate proficiency on the Keystone Exams are expensive, time consuming, and overwhelming the capacity of both PDE and school districts to respond.

The legislation also requires the PDE to investigate other methods for students to demonstrate proficiency for graduation outside of the Keystone Exams. PDE will be required to present a report of its findings within the next six months to the House and Senate Education Committees.

On the back of this letter, you will find Frequently Asked Questions – Chapter 4 SB 880 Update, which will explain the impact on students who will graduate prior to 2019.

Please review the following FAQ carefully and discuss with your child.

If you have questions, please contact assessment@philasd.org. Additional parent information (translated in nine languages) on PSSA and Keystone testing can also be found on the districts' home page by clicking on the banner PSSA and Keystone Parent Information.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Christopher Shaffer

Deputy Chief, Office of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment

CHAPTER 4 SB 880 UPDATE FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Introduction

With Senate Bill 880 signed into law by Governor Wolf on February 3, 2016, the use of Keystone Exams as a state graduation requirement or as a benchmark for the need for participation in a Project Based Assessment is delayed until the 2018-2019 school year.

The FAQs below are designed to clarify the implications of SB 880.

This Frequently Asked Questions document is designed to address the impact on students who will graduate prior to 2019.

- 1. Is participation in the Keystone Exams still required?**
The federal requirements regarding state assessments have not changed. While students graduating prior to 2019 are no longer required to demonstrate proficiency on the Keystone Exams in order to meet the state graduation requirements, participation in the state assessments remains a federal requirement.
- 2. If a student is graduating prior to 2019 and has not achieved proficiency on a Keystone Exam, is supplemental instruction still required?**
Schools shall offer supplemental instruction but students are not required to participate. The design of supplemental instruction remains a local decision.
- 3. If a student is graduating prior to 2019 and has not achieved proficiency on a Keystone Exam after one administration, is a retest required?**
Retesting is not required; however, a student may retest. If a student does retest, the school must offer supplemental instruction prior to the retesting.
- 4. In summary, what parts of Chapter 4 are suspended?**
The following highlights the impact of the moratorium on students graduating in 2017 and 2018:
 - The state graduation requirement to demonstrate proficiency on the associated Keystone Exam or related Project Based Assessment is suspended.
 - The administration of Project Based Assessments for students not proficient after two Keystone attempts is not required.
 - Student participation in supplemental instruction is no longer required; however, a school must offer supplemental instruction as an option. (See #3 and 6 above.)

Looking Forward

- 1. Looking ahead, what options will be available to students to meet the state graduation requirements after the expiration of the moratorium?** As required by SB 880, PDE has been charged with investigating and developing alternatives in addition to the use of the Keystone Exams as a requirement for graduation and shall within six months issue a report of its findings and recommendations to the General Assembly regarding the following:
 - Implement alternative methods for students to demonstrate proficiency for graduation in addition to Keystone Exams, Project Based Assessments and other alternatives provided for in Chapter 4.
 - Improve and expedite the evaluation of Project Based Assessments.
 - Ensure that no student is prohibited from participation in vocational-technical education or elective courses or programs as a result of supplemental instruction

PDE will be implementing an outreach plan to solicit feedback from stakeholders across the state to accomplish these tasks.