

Pennsylvania's Keystone Exams

What are the Keystone Exams?

The Keystone Exams are standards-based, end-of-course assessments designed to assess proficiency in the subject areas of Algebra I, Literature, and Biology. They are central to several pathways in Pennsylvania's [statewide high school graduation requirements](#).

When will my child take the Keystone Exams?

The Keystone is administered by SDP schools during the Winter window (January) and during the Spring window (May). First-time Keystone takers typically sit for the assessment during the Spring window as they near the completion of their Algebra 1, English 2, and/or Biology course(s). The Winter window is typically reserved for students to retake the Keystone if they did not score proficient on their first attempt. Students may also retake the Keystone during the Spring window. The calendar for the Keystone testing windows can be found [here](#). You should also consult [SDP's Assessment Calendar](#) as well as your child's school calendar for specific Keystone administration dates.

What do teachers do with my child's Keystone results?

Individual student scores, provided only to your child's school, can be used to assist teachers in identifying your child's strengths and weaknesses. This then allows teachers to personalize your child's instruction to best support their growth. Additionally, since the Keystones are one component of Pennsylvania's statewide high school graduation requirements, schools will utilize these results to identify which content students who are planning to re-test need further instruction in to better prepare them to score Proficient on their second attempt. Keystone scores also provide information to schools and districts that support improvement and planning discussions around curriculum and instruction.

What types of questions are asked on the Keystones?

For all three Keystones, students need to answer a variety of multiple choice and constructed response questions. Constructed responses are submitted in writing and scored using a rubric. For more information on this topic, please consult the [Literature](#), [Algebra 1](#), and [Biology](#) test design documents.

What types of scores are reported on the Keystones?

For all three tested subject areas, students receive a raw score, a scale score, and a performance tier rating (Below Basic, Basic, Proficient, or Advanced) that is associated with a specific scale score range. The scale score associated with each performance level differs by subject area. For a deeper breakdown, you can consult the Pennsylvania Department of Education's [scale score ranges table](#).

Additionally, the Pennsylvania Department of Education provides schools with reports on individual student performance by module. Each Keystone Exam consists of two modules.

What does it mean to be Below Basic, Basic, Proficient, or Advanced?

The Pennsylvania Department of Education has [performance level descriptors](#) for Algebra 1, Literature, and Biology.

For the **Literature Keystone**, the two modules are (1) Fiction Literature and (2) Nonfiction Literature. For the **Algebra 1 Keystone**, the two modules are (1) Operations and Linear Equations & Inequalities and (2) Linear Functions & Data Organization. For the **Biology Keystone**, the two modules are (1) Cells & Cell Processes and (2) Continuity and Unity of Life.

Are the Keystones timed?

The Keystones are not timed, but students cannot complete a module over multiple days. If students start a module on a Monday, they cannot finish that section on Tuesday. The Pennsylvania Department of Education provides an estimated test-taking time for each Keystone Exam. For Biology, both modules take around 72 minutes each. For Literature, both modules take around 73 minutes each. And for Algebra 1, both modules take around 75 minutes to complete. However, students are not required to finish the exam within that time frame, and they are given additional time as necessary to complete the exam.

Do the Keystones affect my child's grade?

This test does not affect students' grades. However, they are central to two pathways in Pennsylvania's [statewide high school graduation requirements](#).

How does my child take the Keystones?

The Keystones are typically taken via pencil and paper; however, there are also online versions of the assessment. Regardless of which version your child is taking, all students must take the Keystones in person at their school.

Where can I find the results from the Keystones?

Schools receive two paper copies of Individual Student Reports a few months after testing is completed. You can ask your child's school for a hard copy of their Individual Student Report.

Results are also posted in the Parent Portal under the Standardized Test section of the Student Profile.

Who can I contact with further questions about the Keystones?

If you have further questions about the Keystones, we recommend that you reach out to your child's school. The contact information for your child's school can be obtained from SDP's new [School Profiles website](#).

Where can I find additional information on the Keystones?

School District of Philadelphia's Office of Assessment:
<https://www.philasd.org/research/#assessmentsera>

Pennsylvania Department of Education's Keystone Homepage:
<https://www.education.pa.gov/K-12/Assessment%20and%20Accountability/Keystones/Pages/default.aspx>