

**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 the decision that delayed the use of Keystone Exams 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.

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 the PDE and school districts to respond.

The legislation also required the PDE to investigate other methods for students to demonstrate proficiency for graduation outside of the Keystone Exams. The PDE prepared a report of its findings for the General Assembly of Pennsylvania, but the existing law has not changed yet.

On the back of this letter, you will find Frequently Asked Questions – Chapter 4 SB 880 Update, which will explain the impact on students. Please review the following FAQ carefully and discuss with your child.

If you have questions, please contact [assessment@philasd.org](mailto:assessment@philasd.org). Additional parent information (translated in eight 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.

### **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:

- a. The state graduation requirement to demonstrate proficiency on the associated Keystone Exam or related Project Based Assessment is suspended.
- b. The administration of Project Based Assessments for students not proficient after two Keystone attempts is not required.
- c. Student participation in supplemental instruction is no longer required; however, a school must offer supplemental instruction as an option.

### **Impact on students who will graduate in 2019 or beyond.**

**1. Is participation in the Keystone Exams still required?**

The federal requirements regarding state assessments have not changed. Students graduating in 2019 or beyond are still required to participate in the state assessments, which are currently the Keystone Exams. Students complete the Keystone Exams at the end of taking Algebra 1, Biology, English 2, or ELD 3 courses.

**2. If a student is graduating in 2019 or beyond and has not achieved proficiency on a Keystone Exam after one administration, is a retest required?**

The School District of Philadelphia currently does recommend retesting students graduating in 2019 or beyond who have completed a course but who have not demonstrated proficiency on the related Keystone Exam in order to give the students opportunities to demonstrate proficiency. The students must be offered supplemental instruction by their school prior to retesting, but the students are not required to participate in the supplemental instruction in order to retest. The design of supplemental instruction remains a school decision.

**3. If a student is graduating in 2019 or beyond and has not achieved proficiency on a Keystone Exam, is completion of a Project Based Assessment required?**

No student will participate in a Project Based Assessment until guidance on how the current law is changing is provided by the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

**4. What is next?**

The School District will continue to communicate with the Pennsylvania Department of Education and State officials to monitor developments with Chapter 4 rules that govern testing and graduation requirements. As soon as the impact of any changes to current law is known, information will be shared with parents/guardians.