



December 2017

New Laws Affecting Graduation Requirements

Two bills became law in 2017 that impact high school graduation requirements in Pennsylvania. On November 6, 2017, HB 178 was enacted into law as Act 55 of 2017. HB 178 was an omnibus bill that contained a number of legislative pieces, including language around the use of the Keystone Exams. Previously, HB 202 passed into law on June 21, 2017. This legislation, Act 6, amended the school code creating an alternative pathway to meet graduation requirements for career and technical education (CTE) students.

Keystone Exams as Graduation Requirements

Act 55 of 2017 delays the use of the Keystone Exams as a graduation requirement or as a benchmark signifying necessary participation in a project-based assessment until the 2019-2020 school year. This means that students in the graduating class of 2018 and 2019 do not need to demonstrate proficiency on the Keystone Exams in English, Algebra I or Biology, or on a project-based assessment, in order to graduate. At this point, the requirement to demonstrate proficiency on the Keystone Exams or project-based assessment will go into effect with the graduating class of 2020.

Alternative Graduation Pathways for Career and Technical Education Concentrators

In addition to the changes in Act 55 of 2017 delaying the use of the Keystone Exams for graduation purposes, the PA legislature in Act 6 of 2017 also adopted an alternative graduation pathway for students who meet the definition of CTE concentrators.¹

Act 6 establishes that in place of a Keystone Exam, a CTE concentrator can meet the state graduation requirement by completing locally established grade-based requirements for academic content areas associated with each Keystone Exam on which the CTE concentrator did not achieve proficiency and

1. attaining an industry-based competency certification related to the CTE concentrator's program of study; or
2. demonstrating a high likelihood of success on an approved industry-based competency assessment or readiness for continued meaningful engagement in the CTE concentrator's program of study as demonstrated by performance on benchmark assessments, course grades and other factors consistent with the CTE concentrator's goals and career plan.

¹ A "CTE Concentrator" is a student, who by the end of the school year, will be reported as successfully completing at least 50 percent of the minimum technical instructional hours required for PDE program approval.

Looking Ahead

Act 6 and Act 55 of 2017 demonstrate a growing willingness on the part of lawmakers to consider a range of options for students to demonstrate proficiency for high school graduation. The Department of Education has issued a report that includes several additional proposed options for flexible standards-based graduation requirements. PSEA is continuing to monitor, contribute, and help shape discussions about standards-based graduation requirements as they evolve.

Links

PSEA Testimony

- [Graduation Requirements as Tools for Assessment and Accountability](#) (June 5, 2017)
- [Graduation Requirements and High Stakes Testing](#) (September 12, 2016)
- [Statewide Graduation Requirements and PA Core Standards](#) (February 12, 2015)

PSEA Resources

- [A Balanced and Research-Based Approach to Standardized Testing](#)
- [Standardized Testing Fact Sheet](#)

Legislation and Reports

- [Findings and Recommendations Pursuant to Act One](#)
- [Title 24 P.S. Education § 1-121 § 1-121. Keystone Exams](#)
- HB 172 / Act 55: [History](#) [Votes](#) [Text](#)
- HB 202 / Act 6: [History](#) [Votes](#) [Text](#)

For More Information

For policy-related questions, contact Brad Hull, Ph.D., in PSEA's Education Services Department, bhull@psea.org; 717-255-7108. For all other questions, PSEA members should contact their UniServ Representative.