



## **Vote Yes: A Better Approach to High School Graduation Under Senate Bill 1095**

*A plan introduced as Senate Bill 1095 by Senator Thomas McGarrigle (R-Chester/Delaware) creates greater flexibility into graduation requirements by providing students with alternative pathways in addition to Keystone Exams to demonstrate readiness for success after high school. PSBA supports this proposal. Here are the reasons why.*

### **Keystone Exams have high-stakes impact for students**

Current state regulations require students to pass three Keystone Exams in Literature, Algebra I and Biology in order to graduate. In addition, the regulations require students who are not proficient on any Keystone Exam to be provided supplemental instruction and re-take the exam(s) or complete one or more project-based assessments. Using the Keystone Exams for graduation purposes adds a high-stakes element to these standardized tests that can pose a significant challenge to segments of students who otherwise can demonstrate educational ability and postsecondary/career readiness.

### **More states are ending high school exit exams**

A rising discontent with the use of graduation tests is happening nationwide. Research shows that many states are eliminating or scaling back high school exit exams. From a high of 27 states that had or planned to have graduation tests, just 13 required them for the 2016-17 school year. In the past few years, eleven states ended their tests or imposed a moratorium, including Pennsylvania that adopted a moratorium before their tests went into effect.

### **Keystone Exam delay creates momentum for change**

Originally expected to be implemented for the 2016-17 school year, the General Assembly has delayed the effective date of the mandate until 2019-20. The delays were enacted amid concerns that this approach is not and should not be the only appropriate measure of student proficiency or become a barrier in being eligible to graduate. With this recognition comes the opportunity to revise Pennsylvania's mandate to pass three Keystone Exams to receive a diploma. A new plan should lessen the high-stakes impact of the Keystone Exams, eliminate barriers to success and provide alternate pathways for students to demonstrate competency. The momentum is building to create greater flexibility into the state's graduation requirements.

### **Graduation requirements should be consistent with student goals**

The future looks different for every student, whether it be postsecondary education, employment, military or some other career pathway that they choose. Pennsylvania's current graduation requirements fail to provide students with a sufficient number of ways to demonstrate mastery of content and readiness for postsecondary success. Measures of success should be aligned to the student's career goals and reflect the coursework and achievements earned. Demonstrating readiness for success beyond high school should not be narrowly limited to scoring proficient on Keystone Exams.

### **Senate Bill 1095 offers alternative pathways**

As success looks different for different students, better measures of readiness should be used as valid and appropriate graduation requirements. The plan under Senate Bill 1095 is the culmination of recommendations from the Department of Education and extensive discussion and collaboration with leaders in the education community, including PSBA. This proposal not only seeks to address concerns with current graduation requirements by establishing multiple graduation options, but it also prioritizes student postsecondary/career planning by tying these pathways to student post-graduation objectives.

**Option 1: Composite score on Keystone Exams**

A student meets or exceeds a state-specified composite score across the three Keystone Exams and performance in all three test content areas is at least basic.

**Option 2: Local grade requirements + alternative assessments or apprenticeships**

A student completes locally established minimum grades in the associated academic content areas of the Keystone Exams (any science & technology and environment & ecology course may fulfill the requirement) and one of the following:

- A state-defined Keystone equivalent score on an AP/IB exam in the associated Keystone Exam content area
- The Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery Test (ASVAB) at a performance level that would qualify the student for military enlistment
- Certification that the student will begin work in a registered apprenticeship program following high school
- Attainment of a career readiness certificate through satisfactory completion of the ACT WorkKeys® Assessment

**Option 3: Local grade requirements + additional CTE evidence of readiness**

Senate Bill 1095 incorporates the flexibility already provided for career and technical education concentrators under Act 6 of 2017. The proposal simply includes new language to clarify the law about who determines a student's likelihood of success and when that determination is made so that CTE concentrators have sufficient time to explore alternate pathways when needed.

**Option 4: Local grade requirements + additional evidence of readiness**

A student completes locally established minimum grades in the associated academic content areas of the Keystone Exams (any science & technology and environment & ecology course may fulfill the requirement) and three or more pieces of rigorous and compelling evidence consistent with a student's goals as represented in the student's career portfolio, and that reflects the student's readiness for graduation. These may include but are not limited to:

- Passing grade in a dual enrollment course or any postsecondary course at an accredited nonprofit institution of higher education
- Completion of any AP/IB exam at a performance level established by the secretary of education
- Acceptance to an accredited nonprofit institution of higher education
- Receiving a guaranteed full-time employment letter
- Attainment of an industry-recognized credential
- Receiving a certificate of successful completion of an internship, externship or cooperative education program
- Completion of an SAT or ACT subject-specific test at a performance level established by the secretary of education
- Compliance with the NCAA core courses for college-bound athletes with a minimum set GPA or equivalence

Under Senate Bill 1095, the existing requirement for project-based assessments would be eliminated. In addition, the proposal would allow, but not mandate, schools to offer supplemental instruction and put some common sense parameters on such instruction.

**Senate Bill 1095 provides rigorous strategies**

The assessment strategies used by our public schools must be rigorous, valid and meaningful. In creating new state-level graduation requirements, Senate Bill 1095 recognizes these issues by allowing various assessments and pieces of evidence to be used to show proficiency in the knowledge and skills relevant to students' individual career pathways. Attaining success on various assessments and performance-based programs along with coursework grades provides a rigorous and more appropriate overall measure of readiness for graduation. The legislation further emphasizes student readiness for graduation by prioritizing student postsecondary/career planning and tying student objectives to graduation options.