

State Board of Ed. Finalizes Adoption of PA Common Core State Academic Standards, High School Graduation Requirements

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HARRISBURG – The State Board of Education has voted to adopt final-form regulations to amend Chapter 4, Academic Standards and Assessment, of Title 22, the Pennsylvania Education Code, said Secretary of Education Ron Tomalis .

Specifically, the board’s action puts into place the Pennsylvania Common Core Standards and requires students to demonstrate proficiency on a Keystone Exam, validated local assessment or a comparable Advanced Placement/International Baccalaureate exam.

“Governor Corbett believes these changes will ensure that Pennsylvania’s students are prepared to succeed in higher education as well as the increasing rigorous requirements of our workforce,” Tomalis said. “Parents and students can be assured that with these changes in place, those graduating from Pennsylvania public schools will have the skills and knowledge that are needed to be successful.”

“Pennsylvania taxpayers invest a record level of \$27 billion into our public education system and they, too, need assurance that students are being provided with a quality education.”

“Chapter 4 contains the nuts and bolts of our education system,” said State Board of Education Chairman Larry Wittig. “The action taken by the State Board today has strengthened the process by which school districts provide that education. Pennsylvania students, parents, employers and taxpayers should be pleased to finally have consistent predictable graduation requirements for all school districts.”

As required by the new regulations, the Pennsylvania Common Core Standards in English language, arts and mathematics must be implemented in all public schools across the state by July 1, 2013.

Similar to the nationwide Common Core State Standards initiative, which is under way in 45 states, Pennsylvania tailored these standards to meet the needs of Pennsylvania’s students and adopted its own assessments.

Tomalis noted that these rigorous standards will serve as a framework for schools as to what students should be taught and have knowledge of based on their grade level.

The board also adopted the final implementation schedule for the Keystone Exams, which are rigorous, end-of-course assessments designed to ensure a student’s mastery of specific academic content. These exams are required to graduate from a Pennsylvania high school.

Beginning with the class of 2017 – this year’s 8th-grade class – students will be required to pass three Keystone Exams – algebra I, biology and literature – or a comparable assessment to obtain a high school diploma.

The class of 2019 – this year’s 6th-grade class – will be required to pass four Keystone Exams – algebra I, biology, literature and composition.

The class of 2020 – this year’s 5th-grade class – and beyond will be required to pass five Keystone Exams – algebra I, biology, literature, composition, and civics and government.

The composition and civics and government exams are subject to available state funding for development and implementation of each assessment.

Additionally, subject to available funding, five additional Keystone Exams would be made available to school districts for voluntary use based on the following schedule: geometry in 2016-17, U.S. history in 2017-18, algebra II in 2018-19, chemistry in 2019-20 and world history in 2020-21.

The board also voted to repeal the required culminating graduation project, and the Keystone Exams, from counting as one-third of a student’s course grade.

“The Keystone Exams will ensure that students are graduating high school with the necessary skills and academic credentials that are needed to be successful in college and the workforce,” Tomalis said. “Our students deserve to know that they are being provided with a high-quality education that will make them globally competitive.”

“It’s also important for everyone to recognize that the Keystone Exams are aligned to the more rigorous Pennsylvania Common Core Standards and as such, a dip in student test scores is anticipated during this transition,” added Tomalis. “Any decline in scores will improve as students and schools become accustomed to the new academic standards.”

These new academic standards and the Keystone Exams are supported across the state by the business community, higher education leaders and early education organizations.

These groups recognize the importance of increasing academic rigor and the long-term benefit to students and the state’s economy.

For the past few years, the department has put into place comprehensive, high-quality resources, such as the Standards Aligned System (SAS), for schools and educators to use to enhance their academic and instructional programs and services.

SAS is a web-based system that provides educators access to Pennsylvania Common Core-aligned curriculum framework; materials and resources for classroom instruction, including a classroom diagnostic tool that provides details of each student’s strengths, weaknesses, knowledge and skills in specific content areas; voluntary model curriculum; and learning progressions that indicate how students progress toward mastery of the skills needed for postsecondary success.

Statewide, more than 143,000 registered users make use of the SAS website, www.pdesas.org. To date, SAS has been accessed more than 29 million times.

The Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) will no longer be required for 11th-grade students but will continue to be taken by students in grades 3 through 8. Additionally, the PSSA will be aligned to the Pennsylvania Common Core State Academic Standards in the 2014-15 school year.

Now that the board has taken final action to amend the regulations, they will now go to the House and Senate Education committees and Independent Regulatory Review Commission for consideration.